

BEHIND
THE
WORLD
AND
BEYOND


HENRY A.
STIMSON

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BEHIND THE WORLD AND BEYOND



BY
HENRY A. STIMSON

MINISTER OF THE MANHATTAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
NEW YORK CITY



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TO THE MEMORY
OF THOSE DEAR FELLOW
WORKERS WHO HAVE BEEN MY
LOVING HELPERS AND PARISHIONERS IN A
LONG AND HAPPY MINISTRY, WHO HAVE ALREADY
PASSED INTO THE BLESSED REST, AND WHOSE
SPIRIT AND LIFE GO TOWARD THE MAKING
UP OF THAT CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY
IN WHICH LIES THE ONLY SOLVING
OF THE WORLD'S GREAT
PROBLEMS

“E il suo volontade è nostra pace.”
—DANTE.

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PREFACE

THE title of this book, while suggested by the opening chapter, is justified by the subject-matter of the book. It deals with spiritual realities, with what Plato called the *noumena* as distinct from the *phenomena* of life. The latter are what most absorb men's attention, but back of them and beyond them is the realm of the great truths which, while easily overlooked or disregarded, persist through all change, and are eternal. They never are altogether fathomed, and nothing can be better worth attention.

I have long enjoyed the privilege of ministering in a pulpit which, in a loving and generous sense, is absolutely free. A church that desires the truth is not afraid of it in any form. A congregation that contains not a single member who would consciously hinder his pastor in any utterance he might make, because he loves him and trusts him, is one to encourage outreaching thought. These sermons are, therefore, not apologetic. The preacher is not conscious of any pressure to conceal or repress any expression that might

be necessary to convey his thought; nor is he aware of having had convictions in the past, or of having any now, which he is not free to utter. He is limited only by the range of his own knowledge; but he has taught the truth he knows and, as far as possible, has experienced. He wishes his experience were fuller and deeper, and regrets that his knowledge is not greater; but such as it is, it has declared itself, and it has ever been spoken with the interested expectation that he would so speak; while on his own part his belief has been constant that he has had the guidance of the Spirit of God, which is promised to those who seek him.

Imperfectly as his work is done, he believes it to be the truth, which in the times in which we are living God wants declared—the old truth, of course, but expressed in the light of modern thought and adapted to present needs. Not only is it “certain that the world is not made to the measure of any science or philosophy, but on the scale which perpetually summons philosophy and science to reconstruct themselves anew”; but it is also certain that the Christian life is not made to that measure. The law of its nature is fixed, and the pattern is established in Jesus Christ; but it has the duty of continually adjusting itself to that pattern, and of making sure that it is obedient

to the law given once for all. It is called continually to interpret Christ in the terms of daily life, and to apply his teachings to the doubts and fears, the questions and the tasks which each new day presents.

This is the function of the pulpit; and, because this function cannot be exercised by any other agency, I believe that whether men "bear or forbear" there is a perpetual need of the preacher and his work. Because as a preacher I long for witness to this, and the sign of the Lord's approval of it which is found in hearts that respond to it and lives that are helped by it, I have given it to the press. As John Bunyan said of his "Grace Abounding," "I could have stepped into a style much higher than this in which I have discoursed, but I dared not." "God did not play," he further said, "in dealing with him"; therefore he might not play in telling his story; but "be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was."

I would add to the prayer with which my message was delivered the earnest prayer that in this form it may be accepted of the Lord, and made useful to its readers.

HENRY A. STIMSON.

August 1, 1910.

“Slight as thou art, thou art enough to hide,
Like all created things, secrets from me,
And stand a barrier to eternity.
And I, how can I praise thee well and wide
From where I dwell upon the hither side,
Thou little veil for so great mystery?
When shall I penetrate all things and thee
And then look back? For this I must abide,
Till thou shalt grow and fold and be unfurled
Literally between me and the world.
Then I shall drink within beneath a spring
And from a poet's side shall read his book.
Oh! daisy mine, what will it be to look
From God's side even of such a simple thing?”

—ALICE MEYNELL.

I

WHAT LIES BEHIND THIS PUZZLING WORLD?

"For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain even of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."—Acts 17. 28.

EITHER there is something behind this puzzling world, or there is not. There is no third in the alternative. There is a God, or there is not. Every man's life shows on which side of that alternative he is; and he must be on one side or the other.

Let us admit at once that when we speak of proof, in the accepted scientific and demonstrable sense, we cannot prove the existence of God. But it is equally true that the nonexistence of God cannot be proved. We have come to know that the field of science and of logical demonstration is limited. We have passed the age when the contrary was held. The last half of the last century witnessed the great scientific awakening which may be regarded as having constituted the birth of modern science. We were all carried away by it. A new world of thought had opened, and undreamed-of

powers were discovered to be in the hands of scientific men. As is the case with every discovery of a new power, the claim made for them was all-embracing. Religion and science, no less than physics and chemistry, the unseen world no less than the seen, were all haled before their tribunal, and accepted beliefs were as violently cross-examined as is the accused in the French criminal courts, and were in most cases ruthlessly swept away. Ruskin protested that men no longer believed in God because they did not "find God in a bottle." No truth was accepted except on the authority of the test-tube and the laboratory.

But the day for that has passed. It wrought havoc with the peace of many good men. Leslie Stephen, in his biography, says that Tennyson "all his life was troubled lest men of science should some day do away with God, and, therefore, with the basis of morality"; as if science and the duty of living a decent life rested on scientific proof. Long ago Frederick W. Robertson wrote, "In the darkest hour through which a human soul can pass, whatever else is doubtful, this at least is certain—if there is no God, no future state, yet even then it is better to be generous than selfish, better to be true than false, better to be brave than to be a coward."

The fact is, we have come to know that there are many other methods of knowledge than that of physical demonstration or logical process. The mind of man is open to the whole circle of truth, certain broad ways leading to him at its center. We are glad to know them. The men of science have cast them up as highways, and made paths, easy and straight.

But on either side, and sweeping the entire field, is a vast territory, through which many other ways wind, many yet perhaps to be cleared, but all open to the ingress of a world of truth in many instances vital to man's needs and already essential in his daily life, but which are not labeled, and are perhaps little known to many wise men of science. Dr. James Martineau through the whole period of scientific contention did not fail to claim that it is a part of a sound philosophy to hold that truth can be comprehended by the heart no less than by the head. We have many a clear comprehension, which we call instinct, or feeling, or what you will, in the aggregate convincing, satisfactory, conclusive, and the possession of all men. Paul appeals to this in his address to the Athenians. He says, You all are worshipers. You all are seeking to know the gods, all of them. You even set up an altar

to the Unknown, and you do it because we are all a common humanity, bound to seek God, "if haply we may feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being." Your own poet, as you know, has put it, "For we are also his offspring." He held the attention of his Athenian audience, and the same truth holds the attention of men to-day, for there is that in every heart which responds to it.

We are aware, however, that a multitude may think a thing, or believe a thing, or unitedly need a thing, and yet that thing not exist. Thought may have slight connection with reality. Human history is a long tale of egregious superstition and unfounded traditions. But in this instance we do well to look a little deeper, and to consider what man is in himself, who thinks these thoughts and is everywhere conscious of these needs.

We know pretty accurately how man came to be. There was a day, or, as certain books put it, "once upon a time" a living cell existed. Perhaps there were many of them, but one is enough for our purpose. That cell was more wonderful than anything else that has existed since, as the acorn is more wonderful than the oak. For the acorn not only contains the

oak potentially, but it contains all oaks and all trees, and, like the "flower in the crannied wall," to one who can understand, would give the story of all vegetable life. That cell had the power of reproduction, multiplying itself in others like itself.

Then there came a day when the outer world made an impression of a definite kind upon the cell. For example, rays of light began to beat upon it. The cell commenced to respond, and sensation appeared. Out of that sensation, which was the response of the cell to the outer world, arose, in turn, the developed eye, as its answer to the light, the eye of the ant in its microscopic power, and the eye of the eagle, the splendid telescope; the ear, its response to sound, so fine that it can hear the faintest sound, and so intricate that it can comprehend the very harmonies of heaven; the organs of smell, of taste or touch, wonderful in their variety and boundless in their scope.

Soon there was occasion for the living organism, possessing some of these faculties, to turn in one direction or another, to accept or reject—in short, to make what appeared to be the beginning of what we know as choice. The tendril of the bean began to wind about the supporting stake in one direction, and not in another, and maintained that direction. The

rootlet stretched out through the dry ground toward the distant moisture; the tender sprout spent its young strength in a desperate struggle to escape from darkness into the region of the neighboring light. This is not the whole story; much lies between, much of which we know nothing. But these events are like the mountain peaks from which we survey a wide territory, aware that much life and many an eventful history lies hidden in the intervening valleys.

One day there awoke the consciousness that the organism was itself making these decisions. Then it had for the first time the reality of choice, the possession of self-knowledge and of will; then at once appeared the foundations of character, and the path opened for that development which we now recognize as the spiritual beauty of the creature who can do right as opposed to wrong, and can win to himself the approbation of virtue. The most startling moment in history was when that strange organism possessing this new consciousness, and beginning to ascend by this wonderful path of character, coming to himself, suddenly turned and, addressing the world about him, said: "I am not of you. By your aid I came to be what I am. I am your kin, but you are not my creator. Your companionship is not

enough for me. I must look up and not down, forward and not backward. I must reach out for God."

We recognize it as the voice not only of a man, but as the voice of humanity. It was the first confession, and it remains the complete prospectus. It declared the native endowment, and proclaimed the ultimate attainment, the final goal toward which all life is directed.

At once we ask, Where did that first man get that idea? Does it not correspond to the actual fact? Is not here indeed the explanation of a long history? Everywhere the response of the living organism has been to the truth of existence. Step by step those responses have come, and in making them life has advanced from the lower to the higher. This result is not the outcome of a process which has been ruled by chance. Here is no record of the "fortuitous concourse of atoms"; here is no "witches' dance of molecules" in empty space. Here are plan, and purpose, and result. The cry of man standing on the summit is the declaration of the truth that has dominated all from the beginning. God is behind his universe. This is the moment for which God has waited. Here is the earth with its inhabitants, the sufficient result.

What, then, is behind this world? A rational universe requires a rational God. Mind is the highest product of the evolutionary process, and mind is rational; that is, it has this as its natural, its normal trait; it acts in a systematic way. It discovers and establishes laws of thought. It never is content with disconnected fact. It is only satisfied when its comprehension of fact moves on to the discovery of the relations of facts. It calls its acquisitions knowledge only when this relationship is established. However life began—the life which has resulted in man endowed with these powers of mind and heart—it requires a God. There must be this counterpart to our moral and spiritual natures, as there is everywhere about us a counterpart to physical nature. Man is an outreaching being. His life is not complete without this search for, and this effort to attain, what is above and beyond him. He yearns to know that being who is

“A Presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.”

Hence he has always and everywhere made for himself a religion. The old Greek historian, Plutarch, said: “You may find people without morals, without laws, without manners, but

you can find none without altars, without sacrifices, without worship."

The phenomenon of an instinct, an impulse, a general conviction, call it what you will, of the mind of man to reach out after God is too vast for any other explanation than that it is true to fact.

"Looking from the finite to infinity,
From man's dust to God's divinity,"

is a true impulse. There is a God adequate to meet man's needs, and the mind of man in its superior moments cannot escape the sense of his presence. Clerk Maxwell said, "I have looked up many strange theories and have found that none of them will work without the intervention of God." In the height of the scientific storm of the last century Professor Tyndall delivered a famous address before the British Association of Science at Belfast, in which he swept away the foundations for faith in everything beyond the material world. Years after a friend asked him, "When at the bound of things what did you find?" He replied, "I stood before the Eternal." "Why, then, did you not say so in your Belfast address?" was the inevitable question. And there came the slow reply, "It was a great mistake!"

Faith in God, then, is something more than a religious experience, which may be the pos-

session of a few, and is always open to the incredulous distrust of the many. It is a response, normal and compelling, to the primary facts of life. It rests on "confidence in the world as an honest world, in which form it corresponds to fact and to truth; confidence in the searchings of science and the inspirations of hope; confidence in the goodness of the good and the badness of the bad; confidence that the rational order is grounded in the Eternal Reason, and the moral order in the Eternal Righteousness; confidence in the evidence of our own souls in their better hours; confidence, in a word, that the worthiest explanation of existence is the true one." This is the final conclusion of the scientific theologian, and is none the less the conclusion of the man in the street who opens his eyes to the facts of existence, and turns his thoughts in upon the needs of his own soul and the voices of his own heart.

Bear in mind, then, what is the alternative—either God and his world, or the world unaccounted for. There is no third to this alternative. Whatever your mood or your purpose of indecision, every one, as a matter of fact, is ordering his life one way or the other. You recognize God as in all and over all, or you are acting as if there were no God. Here is

the justification of the Christian faith. Religion is a way, and the man who believes in God walks in it. Religion is a life, and the man who believes in God strives with all his might to live that life. God is revealed in Christ. He is a living Presence, and the Christian is the man who believes it and knows it and rejoices in it, and every day is trying to live in the full consciousness of that divine Presence. The Christian faith is the faith of a man who believes that existence is given to us as a blessing, and not as a curse; and it moves straightforward to the recognition of Him who gave it. It rests itself upon God, because in him it finds help to do right. Its affirmation is that it gives the assurance of pardon and the sense of peace.

We come to this conclusion: If God is behind this world, as he indubitably is, then he is in the world, and beyond it. We come from him, we live with him, and we shall appear before him at last. Contrasting the results of the two positions in the alternatives that are before us, the faith of the atheist has proved itself everywhere sterile, drear, with no conviction and no comfort, and, at last, with no hope and no peace. The faith of the Christian is the faith of the multitude who in believing have found life, life at its very best, wide as

the universe, luminous, clear, glorious, having a firm hold of that which now is, and the assurance of that which is to come. The psalmist wrote, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." Was his word too severe?

II

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?

"As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more"—PSALM 103. 15, 16.

WE feel no serious sadness over the fading of the grass and the leaves in the autumn, for we know they will soon return, and the earth will appear with renewed beauty in the opening spring. It is very different in regard to man. He dies, and his place knows him no more. The question before us is not primarily, What is the purpose of life? but, Has life any purpose? The question is vital, for the answer inevitably shapes a man's life. As we think in our heart, so we are. If the golfer is startled to discover that the slightest mental distraction spoils his stroke, should it be hard to convince any man who is in earnest that it is necessary to think straight and reach conclusions if he will have his life run straight and true?

Has life, then, any purpose; and, if so, what is it? We make a purpose, surely enough, each

one for himself. Just now the great Dutch painter Israels, who is over eighty years of age, is producing beautiful pictures, the counterpart of those of his great days. For him, certainly, life has a purpose, and he holds to it. The ancient alchemist, whose portrait we have come across so often in the stories of the Middle Ages, sitting over his flasks and his crucibles, his hair white and his beard long, intent on turning base metal into gold, had a dominant purpose. The aged millionaire whose figure was so well known in Wall Street, and whose name was familiar in the banking world of both continents, who died the other day, leaving a vast fortune to his widow to distribute, because he could never bring himself to part with a single cent, had set to a sufficient certainty his purpose in life. It was to accumulate and to keep money to the end. The old tramp, who shuffles along the sidewalk, past my house, with eager face and pendent arms, has his purpose. It is to get a "square meal." The lawyers and the business men hurrying downtown in the morning see each his purpose; and the old club-man sauntering down the avenue, well gloved and groomed, with a flower in his buttonhole, to sit in the club window, or play his diurnal game of whist, knows his purpose and holds to it.

We are all at it. Our purposes are various and innumerable. But they largely control us all; and the hustle of life is made by the rush with which we all respond to the pressure of the great city, where we are each striving to maintain our position. The white mice said to Alice in Wonderland, "Here it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place." We are all running, and most of us are content if we can hold our place. Our purposes do not reach the change beyond. Perhaps some of us feel a little superior, as we say, "How foolish!" when we look at others and see in what direction they are spending their strength. We are wiser, and we are content. A character in a recent French story, when men worried themselves about things beyond him, used to say, "I am a man who only knows how to plant cabbages." That was his purpose in life. He had mastered its details and it was enough for him. Why should he bother about anything beyond?

Larger minds, however, are not so easily content. For life is always larger than any theory of life. And there is that in the heart of man which some time or other is sure to cry out to something more, and to yearn for something beyond. Tennyson attached great importance to his poem, "The Ancient Sage,"

which deals with the problems of life. Its note is the confession :

“My son, the world is dark with griefs and graves,
So dark that men cry out against the heavens.”

John Stuart Mill, with all his learning and success in life, succumbed at last to what he called “the disastrous feeling of ‘not worth while.’” He found that he had no clue to the meaning of life. And he thought the game not worth the candle. Cardinal Newman poured out his heart in the “Apologia”: “To consider the world in its length and breadth, its various history, the many races of men, their stories, their fortunes, their mutual alienations, their conflicts, their aimless courses, their random achievements and acquirements, . . . the greatness and littleness of man, his far-reaching aims, his short duration, the curtain hung over his futurity, the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the prevailing idolatries, the dreary, hopeless irreligion; that condition of the whole race so fearfully yet so exactly described by the apostle, as ‘having no hope and without God in the world’”—all this is a vision to dizzy and appall, and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound misery which is absolutely beyond

human solution. Many men say, "Great or small, grand or ignoble, what does anything matter, if we are but the creatures of a day, with no destiny?" Maeterlinck in his essay on the "Intelligence of the Flowers" describes the life of the flower as governed by the single purpose "to escape above the fatality below, to evade, transgress the heavy somber law, to set itself free, to shatter the narrow sphere, to invent or invoke wings, to escape as far as it can, to conquer the space in which destiny incloses it, to approach another kingdom." Shall man do less; shall his life have a less noble, a less compelling purpose, especially when he can know what that purpose and goal are, and the flower cannot?

The kind of purpose one will accept for life will depend upon what kind of a man one is. A theory of life is endowed with a soul only by the soul of the man who holds it. Only as his soul comes into play does life become serious to him. Otherwise it matters little what his purpose is, or how often he changes it, so long as he can content himself from day to day. When he awakes to discover that immortality is his goal and eternity awaits him it becomes of moment for him to know how he shall live.

The psalmist says: "When I consider thy

heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?" The same heavens, the same moon and stars are over us. In the silence of the cloudless night we cannot walk beneath them without asking the same question. They have a purpose. They move on their eternal way, fulfilling his will. They are magnificent, not simply in their heavenly beauty, but in the stately majesty of their eternal and undeviating steadfastness to that for which they were created. We feel ourselves caught up in the embrace of the mighty Universe of which we are a part.

The ageless evolutionary process leads somewhere. It has some interpretation. A man discovers the remains of a white marble staircase still in place in the tangled thicket in some Greek valley, or on some mountainside. It had some purpose. It led to something. A temple once was at its top. Men ascended and descended, that they might worship the god for whom it was erected. The innumerable steps of the wonderful staircase of Nature most surely were not shaped by a smaller purpose, surely cannot lead to a less worthy adoration.

President Woodrow Wilson told the other day the story of a poor woman who had

stumbled on one of Darwin's books. She said it "took all the kick out of her." It gave her "something to chew on." Life had been hard and humdrum. Only with much-tried patience had she borne it. She could understand little of its meaning and had thought little of what lies behind or beyond. This book gave her children no bread, but, somehow, as she said, it showed her "something doing." It told of a great plan in which she had some little place. It changed the vision of her life.

Surely that was worth something. That vision had value. It lifted for her the horizon; and that is no small thing for any man. It gave her a place in the universe. It oriented her life with the Eternal.

You all are busy men and women. You have purpose to get knowledge, or money, or success, or only, if sick, to get well. It is for the hour sufficient. It is in large measure all-absorbing. All this is excellent, but you and I know that it is all subordinate. We must ask, "What is the real purpose of it all?" "What really is man?" Surely there is something more than these!

Let us go to headquarters for our answer. Let us interrogate the one Perfect Man. Whatever may be your opinion of Jesus Christ, he certainly, more than any other who has lived

upon earth, grasped the real purpose of life. He knew what was in man. He touched the hearts of men. He understood the meaning of life. He did not confuse values; he saw clear and thought straight, if anyone ever did.

Now, the notable thing about Jesus is the way in which he changed and subverted values. Take the most important of all. Go to the very center of things. See how he altered men's estimate of life itself. Up to his day life was everywhere the supreme good. Men fought for it and sacrificed anything to protect and insure it, because they knew nothing beyond. Death extinguished all. A dead man was the least to be regarded, the most despicable of objects. Jesus said, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it." At once, first a few and then a throng of followers of Jesus were ready to fling their lives away. The noble army of martyrs began their slow procession across the centuries. They sang their songs triumphant in the midst of the amphitheater, and with radiant face confronted the murderous shouts of their persecutors. From that day "the multitude, which no man can number," has been passing out of this life, sustained by the faith of Jesus and the strength of the conviction that they were not losing life,

but winning it, as the things that are seen slip from them and the things that are not seen become to them the blessed reality.

Then, as to success and wealth, we hear Jesus telling the story of the rich man, who had much goods laid up for many years and said to his soul that he would tear down his barns and build greater, to whom comes the solemn warning, "Thou fool!" And ever since men have faced that word and have found themselves compelled, even with their hands upon the world's greatest wealth and most notable successes, to ask whether the same condemnation should fall upon them. Again, in regard to home, and friends, and pleasure, we hear him saying, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself," and giving the promise of richest blessing to those who will forsake father and mother, and wife and children, and homes and land, for his sake and the gospel. And we are thrilled again with the missionary tales of the Christian centuries. First the apostles themselves, "debtors" to Greeks and Barbarians, Parthians, Scythians, bond and free, then Augustine and Patrick, and Columba and Columbanus, and Xavier, and Schwartz, and Carey, and Livingstone, and Coleridge Patteson, and Falconer, and Pitkin, and the multitude of the foreign mis-

sionaries in every land to-day. Then, we think of health and exemption from pain as a chief good, for which men have everywhere striven, and we hear the disciple of Jesus saying: "I besought the Lord thrice that my thorn in the flesh might depart from me. And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." In many a sick-room is to be seen to-day the comfort of the Lord, and many a suffering form is sustained by the Everlasting Arms. And many a dear child of God is gaining a new sense of the divine compassion and acquiring a new power of faith and of sympathy and of love for God's men. So Jesus set up another goal, and established another purpose in life, which he made supreme for all men. It had to do with God. It fixed the final answer to the supreme question. Life is given to us that we may know God. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Get at God's purposes. Grasp his character. Accept his com-

mandments. Come to him and know him. That is the purpose of life.

It is a man's work. It is worth the doing. Many men are saying to-day, "Give us a man's work." They find the organization of life too intricate; its details, as they present themselves, too petty. They long for what requires a larger grasp, a more heroic effort, a more prolonged and steadier purpose, than they find in the vast majority of appeals that come to them for coöperation. Here is the summons that will satisfy every need. It is, Live your life! Recognize its meaning. Understand that it is to know God; to so find him, and believe in him, and live for him, that all your life shall be drawn into that purpose and controlled by it for good.

One says: "My purpose is to cultivate myself. I have a right to make the most of my talents and my opportunities." So far good. The talents and the opportunities are God's good gifts. Life as possessing them is to be lived to-day, for opportunities pass and talents may be lost. But is your cultivation of yourself to the end that you may know God and serve him? Otherwise you are wrong. Your life is going astray. Another says: "My purpose is to care for my family. That is all I can do. To clothe, to house, to feed, to edu-

cate them, takes all my strength. It is my task. No other will do it." That is well. There is no better task for you. But is it that you may fit them for God; to lift them to the plane of life in which they shall know him and be fitted for his service? Are you giving them the equipment with which they shall be children of God in a larger and truer sense, if God will, than you have been yourself? Another says: "My purpose is to do good, to help men." That is well. But why are you doing it? Is your devotion to your society, or your class, or whatever may be the agency to which you are devoting yourself, for your own satisfaction or for your own glory and self-praise, or because it is yours and not another's? Is it that, or are you doing it for God to promote his kingdom and make known his love? If so, you will be humble and patient, and considerate of others, and self-sacrificing. You will find your reward and your joy in the kindness of your own heart as at the close of the day you shut yourself up alone with God to thank him for the privilege of rendering one more day's service. Here is the real purpose of life. The man who holds and is held by it attains life; and the man who turns from it, surely he loses his life.

III

CAN SIN BE FORGIVEN?

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get. But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be thou merciful to me a sinner."—LUKE 18. 10-13.

THIS story told by our Lord, if it does not answer our question, sets before us at once the real conditions which underlie it. One of these men did not believe himself a sinner in any serious sense. The other knew that he was, but did not know how he could find forgiveness. The real question before us is not so much, "Can sin be forgiven?" as, "Are we sinners?" The fact is that we do not know much about sin in the biblical sense, or care much about it.

It was not always so. It is not many years since sin was the burden of the minister's preaching, and the confession of sin and the cry to know how to obtain the forgiveness of

God were the burden on the hearts and lips of his congregation when their interest was aroused and they turned to him for guidance. It is not so now. One seldom hears a confession of sin in the old sense, one that is anything other than the acknowledgment of having gone wrong, or having done something that one wishes one had not done, and there is good ground for the doubt as to whether the community at large has any other view of sin than that it is largely the result of ignorance or carelessness.

Of course, we know there are sinners. I remember that when Mr. Moody was first in New York, at the time of his great meetings, a story was told of his interview with a rich lady, who said to him when he was talking of the need of repentance, "Why, Mr. Moody, I am not a sinner." "Who, then, are sinners?" was the surprised reply. "O, just young men in their wild days." There are sinners without doubt to-day in India, for we hear of the licentious form of their worship, and the orgies that attend it, and we can well believe the destructive effect upon the people at large. Over in China, also, there are sinners; and sin is somewhat near to us in Chinatown, if we can believe the story of what goes on there. The "white slave" traffic also disturbs us with the disclosure of

sin in such horrible form so near our doors. We are shocked also all too frequently with the exposures in the courts and newspapers of men high in position in the great commercial trusts and the insurance companies and the banks who are dishonest, or who even descend to mean and petty forms of thieving. Now and again some prominent member of the church is caught in similar transactions, and we know that not a few are the owners of tenements where the poor of the city are herded, and are content to maintain conditions in those tenements unfit for human habitations, because of the profit to themselves. The divorce courts distress us also with their horrid tales and their revelation of evil among those whose circumstances would seem to remove them from the ordinary temptations of life. Then there is the gambling passion so hard to control, breaking out continually in circles even of Christian people, who in their eagerness to make money for some good cause, or to win something for themselves, yield to the temptation to join in schemes that thinly clothe gambling devices. Now and again we feel the pressure of the jealousy and the envy and the evil-speaking that exist in the world about us, from which even we ourselves are not entirely free. "The woman with the serpent's tongue"

does not live only in London. We think of the Christian people absorbed in their own pursuits, seeking their own comfort, or success, or pleasure, with little sense of duty to God or to others, and no sense of sacrifice, and we are compelled to stop and say, Perhaps there is more sin in the world than we thought. Perhaps we are not so free as we could wish. It may be that we have senses that are dull and need both conviction of sin and the assurance of pardon, which can only come to those who realize what they are doing and truly repent. The cry of the publican, perhaps, should be far more general than it is, and the comfortable boast of the Pharisee should be recognized more widely in its hideous untruthfulness and its unrecognized shame.

Having said this, we now must ask, What is the testimony of the past? What have men always thought about themselves, and what has been their attitude toward forgiveness, or their expression of the need of it? Men have had, always and everywhere, some form of religion, and, always and everywhere, religion has been connected with sacrifices. The best-known history is that of the Semitic races, those from which our modern civilization has chiefly come, and students have given much labor to interpreting the significance of their

worship. They have reached this conclusion, that the sacrifices which always accompanied the worship were an expression of the thought that their sins had in some way separated them from the fellowship of their god or gods, and the sacrifice was offered as a confession of the wrong and a supplication for the return of the offended deity. The feast which always followed the sacrifice was to indicate that the interrupted communion was restored, and the joy which the feast expressed was because of that restored fellowship. A meal shared with others has always had something of that significance. The Bedouin in the desert treats his guest as a friend so long as they are eating together, no matter what may be the real relationship when they are outside the tent.

When we turn to the Old Testament we find that it divides itself into three great periods. During the first of these, that extending down to about the eighth century before the Christian era, the thought of the meaning of sacrifices was slowly, but significantly, enlarged. They marked the effort to reëstablish interrupted communion with God. They began also to represent something of the character of God as holy, and to lay emphasis upon the inner attitude of the worshiper, both toward the crime

he had committed and the god whom he sought to propitiate. They connected such propitiation with visible worldly good, and looked upon the blessings of this life, wealth, prosperity, success over enemies, bountiful harvests, as so many marks of that restored relationship.

Then comes the period of the great prophets. Nowhere in human history is there such a group of great men, and nowhere are there writings comparable to those which bear their names. Before all else, they were men who knew God, and also knew what God requires, and what separates men from God. Everywhere they dwell on the need of repentance, active, prompt, and decisive. Their cry is, "Turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" They begin to emphasize the fact of individual responsibility and to declare the privilege of direct approach which every sinner has to God. "Away with your burnt offerings and sacrifices!" they cry. "God has no need of them." "Cleanse your hearts, and not your garments." They tell that God alone can pardon, and that his pardon purifies the soul. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." They sweep aside the excuse of circumstance or of heredity.

“In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity.” Each one is responsible for his own act. A man is a sinner because of what he does and what he thinks.

They have conception of the vicarious nature of suffering as a redemptive agency. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah with its picture of the Servant of God “wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquity, bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows,” which was to become the graphic description of Jesus of Nazareth, suggests that mysterious sharing in the work of atonement by the elect of God by which the atoning purpose of God was to be revealed to the world, and by which men are to be bound together with a new understanding of the meaning and the purpose of the sorrows of life which make all men one.

Then came the period of the development of the priestly ritual. This helped to make effective the great teaching of the prophets by establishing men in the habit of worship, and witnessing to them of the new relation in which they stood to God. Evils arose, as evils are sure to do in connection with every temptation of man to draw near to God in external ways, but the ritual served a great purpose, as public

worship and Christian habits of prayer and reading the Scripture serve a great purpose to-day. And if men are tempted to think that they have fulfilled their obligation to God when they have gone to church on the Sabbath, or have engaged in some accustomed act of private devotion, and then go out and forget what manner of men they are, it is no more to be charged against the value of the worship than the falling away of Israel is to be charged upon the priestly ritual which they had set up.

Through all this God had come to be known as a God who would forgive sinners. But much more remained to be known. Forgiveness can only be effective to those who truly repent, and true repentance can only come to those who have some proper sense of the character of the God whose law they have violated, and from whose allegiance they have departed. John the Baptist, the last of the great prophets, had only this message: "Repent, and make restitution." Such revelation as was given to him of God himself was only intimated in a prophetic way when he beheld Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." But the fullness of time had come, and God had sent forth his Son; and we ask, What was the mission of Jesus Christ?

He has told us himself. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. The lost were not only the children of Israel, but all God's children; and his message was not to that house of Abraham, which had held its knowledge of God as its private possession, but to all God's children; and their need was to know the Father. So we have him, when the question was crowded upon him the third time, telling the story of the lost sheep that the shepherd sought, and the lost money which the woman strove so hard to find, and the story of the lost son, which we call the story of the prodigal son, but which is indeed the story of the prodigal's father. For here was the purpose of Jesus's coming—to make lost sons in all God's world know the Father.

From that Father he had come. He now speaks his word and does his will. His business is to make him known to men; to make him known as a righteous God who loves righteousness and hates iniquity; who can hate the sin and yet love the sinner, and who would deal with the sinner in such a way as to make him also hate sin and turn from it, and love the Father and obey him, and, so doing, to find life for himself.

He proceeds to show what this life from God is meant to be. He lives the perfect life in

such sweetness and beauty that men see it and wonder at it. But he shows it not as a life widely remote, but as the life of one truly of themselves, touched with the feeling of their infirmities, sympathizing with their sorrows, ministering to their needs, always knowing what is in the hearts of men, which he strives everywhere to reach, and, at the same time, ministering to their bodily wants, healing their sicknesses, calling the leper to himself to be cleansed, opening the eyes of the blind, restoring the son to the widow, and weeping at the grave of Lazarus, his friend. Then, only, it is made plain to him that nevertheless those whom he has come to bless will not understand him, and, in fact, despise him and will finally reject him, and he proceeds to tell them that he "must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and be killed." And when Peter begins to rebuke him, saying that this cannot be, he turns to Peter with the sharp words, "Get thee behind me, Satan." For his settled purpose is to do the will of God and make the love of God and the righteousness of God known as they cannot otherwise be known, even though he must die to do so. Thus bearing upon himself the whole weight of the world's sin, and accepting the rejection with its incredible wickedness, he utters the cry, "My God, my

God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And with the sublime act of consecration and glad surrender, in the fullness of his understanding of the divine love, he prays, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Then comes, after the long and stormy day, the quiet evening with its peaceful word, "It is finished."

We ask, What did Jesus accomplish? He made God known to man as never before. He offered himself a vicarious sacrifice in this sense, that he puts himself in others' place and does what is necessary to bring them to God. God did not need to be appeased. God was always merciful and tender. His loving-kindness has been "ever of old"; and God always is the righteous God, and forgiveness always can only be given to those who repent and turn from their sin. Forgiveness on any other terms would be impugning the character of God. Now men see this, and seeing God, as Jesus revealed him, see themselves as they did not see before.

The way of life is open. It is a straight and narrow way, but it is available and near at hand. The outermost sinner can find it, and the chief of sinners shall know that it is open for him; for Jesus Christ has come to take him by the hand and to lead him step by step to God. Jesus himself becomes the embodiment

of a new covenant. God witnesses to himself in him, and by that witness to himself seals the promise that men who will accept that revelation of God which Jesus has made, who will believe it, and will begin to do the will of God as Jesus has made that will known, shall have the assurance not only that their sins are forgiven, but that God by his Spirit will take possession of their hearts and will abide with them in their life. They shall have strength against temptation and power to do right. They shall grow in grace and in the knowledge of God. The work that has begun shall advance through all the vicissitudes of the earthly life, and in spite of many weaknesses, and many possible falls, they will be sustained and cheered and not suffered to be overcome. The love of God in their hearts will well over into an abounding love for others. The sacrificial work of Jesus Christ in their behalf will inspire them to sacrificial lives for their fellow men. They will feel a sympathy of the kind that Jesus felt, and by the grace of God will be enabled to show a helpfulness as real as was his.

Greater works indeed he promised that they should do, and the world to-day has abundant evidence of those works. At last, when God's work in them and with them is done, and they

have played their part in bringing in his kingdom in the world, he will take them unto himself. They shall see their Lord as he is, and find that they have grown so much into his likeness, into the understanding of his purpose and the acceptance of his life, that where he is shall be to them heaven and home. These men have found their God. They are restored to that fellowship with him which the heart craves, for the old word of Augustine is eternally true, "Thou hast made me for thyself, and my heart cannot rest apart from thee." And now, having found God, they love Jesus Christ and bear his name because it was through him that God came to them.

IV

WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR THE WORLD

"God hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his son."—HEBREWS 1. 2.

WHY not be content? We have done our best; or, we cannot alter conditions; or, we are reasonably happy. Why disturb ourselves with questions as to what lies behind, or with matters with which we have no immediate concern? It seems easy for many to live on from day to day and perhaps from year to year satisfied with this. But there are hours when we must think; times even when we must ask, What does God see as he looks at our world?

Always there is much evil; not simply that now and then we are startled by some alarming instance of oppression or cruelty or personal dishonesty or the strife and clash of opposing interests, but we are made aware that these things exist, although it may be possible for us to ignore them, or to be indifferent to them much of the time. We like to fix our thoughts on signs of improvement in the world's condition. We assert with more or less assurance that the world is growing better. There is much of

what passes for progress, and unquestionably great advance in man's mastery over the powers of nature, and in the extent of his knowledge as to how to prolong his life and to secure that accumulation of possessions which promotes his material well-being.

But the insistent question returns, What does God see in this world in which we strive so hard to insure our own well-being, and therewith to be content? God looks not on the outward appearance. He sees the evils that trouble us; but he traces evil to its source; and evil traced to its source becomes sin. In his eye it is not sufficient to arrest the evil or ameliorate its effects; for the sin remains. If employers are unjust in dealing with their employees, law and awakened public opinion may remedy the evil, but the selfishness that inspired the oppression remains untouched and awaits only the new opportunity, which will require new resistance, and which meanwhile is hardening the heart and establishing the character. The group of angry strikers maltreats the girl who remains at work. A few arrests may cause the violence to cease, but the bitter hatred remains. In a given State amending the divorce law may do much to bring peace in homes that otherwise would be disturbed, and to secure better marital relations, but un-

controlled passion, vanity, self-indulgence, impatience, are not reached. The embezzler may be imprisoned and the money restored, but his heart is unchanged, and the unchanged heart is the fruitful source of every evil. The old Puritan preacher, Andrew Fuller, said that twenty years or more before he had heard an evil jest which he had never been able to forget; whereas he had heard many beautiful good things said since then which he had altogether forgotten. Whereupon he commented, "The heart is a foul pool, wherein good fish die, but frogs survive."

So we must ask, Does God care; and need we care? It is an old question. God has seemed far off, or quite out of this world, and men in their thoughtful hours have turned here and there seeking guidance. They interrogated Philosophy, saying: "Tell us what we must do to live"; and Philosophy said in reply: "Endure! Be the master of your own emotions. Rise above the vicissitudes of life. Let the world wag on as it will. Only do not wear your heart on your sleeve. If you must suffer, suffer bravely. If successful, be content. If you fail, try again. It will not last forever, and we all go down at last to a common grave and to the unknown." Then men turned to Culture, and Culture said: "Grow. Lift your-

self above the common things of life. Adorn your home. Cultivate your talents. Refine your person and your surroundings. Be decorous. Be gentle in manners. Be civilized in life. Separate yourself from the vulgar and the base. Live the exalted and solitary life of the man who is able to lift himself above all that is low and ignorant. Try to believe that the further you get from men, the nearer you are to God." But men could not be satisfied with this, for they found that no man can by culture escape from himself. He may succeed in cleansing the outside of the platter, and may still be a whited sepulcher within. Then men turned to the world at large, and the world said: "Live while you live. Fill to the brim the cup of pleasure. Eat, drink, and be merry. Have a good time wherever you are and whatever the conditions, for to-morrow we die." And there have always been multitudes who try to take the advice; and everywhere there have been great centers of luxury and of pleasure toward which the hearts of the multitude have turned. The fascination of "seeing life" is not new.

But the old question has been insistent, and continually men have turned to some form of worship which has passed to them for religion, much of it being Superstition; and Supersti-

tion has said to them: "Adopt a ritual. Go through religious performances, the more austere and prolonged the better. Leave the world to its own devices. Turn, at least for a time, to the doing of what you have been taught, or the guidance of a priestly expert. Seek the aid of the properly initiated, and then dismiss all further care." And, nevertheless, men doing this, when they came to themselves and knew their own hearts, have exclaimed with Saul of Tarsus, "O wretched man that I am! The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."

Turning away from all these sources of relief, weary and oppressed, or frivolous and indifferent, men came to talk about God and evil as men talk to-day. They confounded morality with religion. They found it easy to hold that God is good, and indifferent. They made character a matter of taste, and religion a fad. Even to-day sentimentality may be seen taking the place of a serious view of truth. And public teachers are found making the mistake of supposing that if they are "only vivacious enough, and actual enough, they will enable men to become good without God."

And the world finds no peace. Men talk of law, and progress, and evolution. They have lengthened indefinitely human history, but

morally the work is yet to be done. Evil abounds, and the struggle with sin in the individual heart is as keen and as hopeless as ever. Men deny the existence of God in this world, or in the other, because the world about them gives so much more evidence of the existence of the devil. Reginald Campbell writes: "The poor crippled child, who has been maimed by a falling rock, and the white-faced matchbox-maker, who works eighteen hours out of the twenty-four to keep body and soul together, have surely some sort of a claim upon God apart from being miserable sinners who must account themselves fortunate to be forgiven for Christ's sake. . . . This kind of a God is no God at all. The theologian may call him infinite, but in practice he is finite. He may call him a God of love, but in practice he is spiteful and silly." Men have come to be more shocked by sin against a fellow man than by sin against God, and the thought of God in the beauty and perfection of the divine character seems as remote as it ever was.

But with this as the record and the evidence of the world about us, when we turn to the story of Jesus Christ, and the revelation that God has made of himself in him, we find at once startling testimony concerning God's judgment of sin. This is the single possible

interpretation of the life and death of Jesus Christ. He was "despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," because he was "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." Never did sin seem so sinful, and never was man's need of forgiveness more pronounced. The testimony even of physical science is expressed in the words of Sir Oliver Lodge: "The sacrifice of Christ has convinced the world of sin, to a unique degree, of its relation and dire consequences, of its unreasonableness, its aspect as a disease that must be cured—with a knife if need be, but cured; we have learned that it is foreign to the universe, it is not the will of God, it is not due to his caprice, or amusement, or dictation, or predestination, or pagan example; it is something which gives even him pain and suffering, it is something to be rid of, and there is no peace or joy to be had until unity of will is secured and past rebellions are forgiven. Forgiveness removes no penalty; it may even increase pain, though only of a regenerative kind; it leaves material consequences unaltered, but it may achieve spiritual reform."¹

Men cannot listen to Jesus Christ, or give themselves to his service, without awakening

¹ Hibbert Journal, October, 1904, pp. 24, 25.

to the full significance of sin as involving personal degradation and permanent separation from God, or without the discovery that this conviction of sin opens the way to a knowledge of God and the restitution to fellowship with God that otherwise were both unknown and unsought. Through Jesus Christ we learn that God is one with us in sympathy and in sorrow. Sin is not merely a violation of his law; it is a burden on his heart, a grief, a defeat. God is a Father in the sense of the parable of the prodigal. He suffers far more keenly than the wandering son in his life of alienation. He fights his grief far harder than the son does in his effort to be content with his surroundings. He yearns with an infinite love for his child's restoration and return, and is eager to do all that is possible to win him back; and when he comes, he greets him with a love beyond words in its tenderness, its pity, its healing power, because he himself is so wrapped up in the son of his love. This was the great truth that the world never had known and which the world to-day finds it so hard to believe, that God could "so love the world" in its sin, no less than in its sorrow.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ shows that God is effective to save. He hates sin and loves the sinner. He sympathizes and he suffers, but he

also can save. To-day evidence is to be seen everywhere. Men are actually changed. They have new hearts, and live new lives, by just so much as they are seen to give themselves to the service of Jesus Christ. Coarse and wicked lives are purified. Selfish hearts are made generous. Suffering and want and death are faced, not simply with patience and courage, but with serenity and peace.

Wherever Jesus Christ goes, there human life is restored and ennobled. The spirit of Christ as a matter of visible experience does change men from sin to holiness; from bitter revolt to peace and joy. It gives a meaning to life which cannot be affected by weariness, or pain, or poverty; and that not simply in the army of devoted men and women who, giving up at home all that makes life sweet and precious, have gone to carry the gospel of a forgiving God to the ends of the world in missionary service, but in the far larger number who, called to abide in the conditions in which they are found, as workers in the ordinary service of life, merchants and mechanics, soldiers and sailors, lawyers and doctors, are living as God would have them live, serving their fellow men and bringing in the kingdom of God, doing a steadfast and loving duty to God and their neighbors with dignity and strength and

a growing self-mastery which the world already has come to recognize as typical of men who have a right to call themselves Christians. It is true that wrong endures; that the kingdom of Christ comes but slowly; that many who hear his name are unworthy, and, as Browning says,

“His sad face on the Cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years.”

But he sees far more than this. He sees a multitude of humble disciples fighting a good fight, keeping the faith, and doing their best to bring in the day of his final triumph. This is the irrefutable evidence that God is in his world, and it is well with all who serve him.

V

ON WHAT CONDITION IS HEAVEN TO BE ATTAINED?

"In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."—JOHN 14. 2, 3.

For some reason, nowadays, we are not much concerned about heaven. The life we know is full, absorbing, and brief. It is a man's work. Heaven as pictured by winged cherubs and diaphanous angels does not appeal to us; it does not suggest a man's work.

In one experience we all are alike—we all were born. Another inevitable experience awaits us all—we all shall surely die. We ought to be concerned about what is beyond. It is certain that we cannot come back and try life again.

The question, On what condition is heaven to be attained? divides itself into two parts, Where and what is heaven? and, How can we get there? When we have answered the one we can quickly settle the other.

One thing we know with certainty: Heaven is a place of service. God's universe is dynamic. Everything about us suggests movement. Each form of existence stands related to every other. Each contributes to some other, and our knowledge delights to find everywhere signs of what we know as progress, or movement, from the lower to the higher. Life when we come to know it is always outreaching; and life is from God. God's work surely is not done with this world; nor is it conceivable as limited by this world. Heaven is conceivable only as a place of continued energy. When John, therefore, describing the New Jerusalem come down from God out of heaven, the glorified abode of redeemed souls, says as his final word that there his servants are serving him, we see that the familiar description,

"Where congregations ne'er break up,
And Sabbaths have no end,"

is transcendental and incomplete. Heaven in the Bible is a man's heaven.

It is also a place where service succeeds. The disaster of the life that we know is that here so much does not succeed. Turn where you will, there is disappointment and failure. Take the records of commercial life, where failure is recorded at a percentage hard to believe. Look at the great number of men in

every profession who, having laboriously prepared themselves for their career, find either no opportunity adequate to their attainments or their needs, or find it only to suffer disappointment. They cannot take advantage of it, or it comes too late. Continually death dogs our heels, and ill health constantly incapacitates us. Heaven is to be a place that knows no failures; for it is a place where God's will is done, and the essential feature of all who shall enter heaven is that they are at one with God. They will what God wills, and, therefore, what they will cannot fail. There "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest," because there nothing enters that can interfere with the doing of the will of God, and there all are upheld with the cheer of inevitable success.

Furthermore, it is a place where service satisfies. This seems more difficult. We all are so different one from another; we want different things. It is hard for us to conceive a life, however beautiful, which will satisfy all. But God has made himself known to us as our Father, and a father never loses the individual child in the family group. His love and his care and his planing are all for each as if each was the sole object of his affection. At least this is our conception of fatherhood, and what

we all aim at and delight to think. Its only limitations are those which come from the imperfection of our own powers. But that imperfection cannot apply to the heavenly Father. His provision is adequate for all and adjusted to each. We may be sure that that life which is to be the goal and final reward for his servants on earth will bring to each supreme contentment. Furthermore, there are certain things which satisfy every man because we are men. Harmony and beauty and truth and joy and the sense of right and peace, these belong to what we think as supreme good, good in its very nature, good for which we are prepared; and all this belongs to heaven, which God has made for those who love him. This is the story that runs through the entire New Testament. Peter says, "We look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Paul thinks that the time for his departure is at hand. He exclaims, "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing;" and John knows heaven as the abode of those who have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

We also know with certainty that heaven is

a place of growth. This is the mark distinctive of life. Life is not only forthputting; it is forthputting for a purpose. It seeks everywhere to attain to something more and better. The bud becomes the flower; the sapling the tree; the child the man. Herein lies the blight and misery of death. We cannot conceive of life continuing in the face of death; for death obliterates all hope of growth. There seems to be nothing beyond. When, therefore, we are told that death is conquered and life is to be restored, at once we are possessed with the thought of continuous growth. We have the vision of ever-enlarging powers, of infinite possibility of attainment. This is why the revelations of the Scripture always move us to awe. Whenever we contemplate the story of a man lifted out of the ordinary conditions in which death seems to end all, we find ourselves arrested with the thought of the possibilities that must then have opened before him. Enoch "walked with God, and was not, for God took him." We wonder what Enoch saw, and how he felt, and what new powers were given, and what development of his own powers, beyond imagination, appeared. Moses on the mount talked with God, and God "passed before him," with that merciful restraint of revelation which alone a man could bear, for

“no man can see the face of God and live.” And as God “covered him with his hand” and passed by, and with the sense of the divine presence he knew “Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving-kindness and truth,” we recognize an anticipation of the day when the redeemed “shall see him as he is, and be like him.”

So with all the prophets. They had visions of God, and with them came that uplift of the soul which made them at once the men they are, unique in their position in human history, in their account of God, and in their hold upon the hearts and consciences of men in every age who long to know God. And when we come to the beloved disciple alone on the rocky islet with the glories of the Ægean sunset, changing into the splendors of the New Jerusalem, we are prepared to find his powers failing in his attempt to describe for us the wonders of the world that for the moment was visible to him.

The transcendent truth that runs through all is that heaven is the place of the enlargement of those powers with which human life is endowed as the summit and the crown of God's work in this world. In the world that lies beyond, these powers are surely to expand and develop in directions that are limitless, until the mind falters in its attempt to picture

to itself what is the life which God has assured to us.

In that world up to which the long patience and compassion of God has led, we also know with certainty that heaven is the place for the completed work of Jesus Christ. That work was to bring men to God. And this was the way of it. He made sin hateful. He showed that it was sin against God, our heavenly Father. He set the Pharisee, in his supreme complacency, over against the poor publican beating against his breast and not lifting so much as his eyes to heaven, as he cried, "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner"; and men saw what sin really is in the setting up in the heart of something else than God as the supreme object of love and of obedience. Men began to see what it means to transgress God's commandments, to rebel against the doing of his will, to harden one's heart against him, and, as Jesus showed the Father in his love and purity and forbearance and righteousness, men repented of their sin and turned to God, and God had mercy upon them and gave them new hearts, and opened for them the possibilities of a new life.

Then men with this new attitude of soul toward God and this new disposition of the mind began to live. They set themselves, stumbling,

it is true, but none the less sincerely and earnestly, to doing the will of God, serving him. And then a new joy came. It was the foretaste of a new heaven and a new earth. Life itself began to change. It acquired a new valuation. It became a pilgrimage rather than an attainment, a progress rather than a goal. Death was robbed of its fears, for there was the assurance that it is the gateway to a life beyond, where God is, and where the fullness of the possessions which God has made possible for his children is to be attained.

There, and there only, is to be found the key to the mystery of life as it is here. Its limitations will be removed. Its perplexities will be understood. Its restricted conditions will be seen to have been helps to its enduring attainments, its sorrows but the shadows by the experience of which its final lights are to be made eternally radiant. There is the final work of Jesus Christ. There is the abode of the redeemed souls whose presentation to the Father is to be to him the final satisfaction.

And now we ask, what are the conditions upon which this heaven is to be attained? Jesus Christ, think of him as you will, is the most startling fact in human history. His birth and life and teachings and death taken together stand incomparable. As an event it

certainly means something. It is not a theology or a theory. Its effects are real, and their influence like them enduring. The world needed him. He came, and from that day the world was changed. You and I even are not the same that we would have been had he not come. Our ancestry, our surroundings, our ideals, the very conditions of the life that we live, our training, our hopes, the goal we have before us, all are other than they would have been but for Jesus Christ. Conceive, therefore, of Jesus Christ as you will, the fact is that he drew a line and forced an abiding distinction between the men who seek to know God and those who do not, or in the same man before and after he makes his choice in that decision which Jesus Christ sets before him. His cross has become the supreme symbol in the world's religion, because it expresses what to-day the world knows as God's judgment of sin. On that cross the Son of God died because of sin, yours and mine. It was that we might be forgiven, and henceforth might be different men. In the language of the apostle, he "died unto sin that we might live unto righteousness." That opens heaven; that makes it a place for those who seek righteousness. Henceforth heaven, in the last analysis, is character; is fellowship with Him who did the will of

God and taught men to do the same. To be with him is, to the man who loves God, to be with one of whom he says, "This is he my soul loves." Heaven is not a place of visions or dreams, or weakness or regrets, but of glad tribute to Jesus Christ, through whom we know God, a tribute expressed in a humble, grateful, but full, eager, earnest, and ever-growing life in our Father's house. In the words of the Lord's promise, it is to be "with him, where he is."

How shall we attain that heaven? By heeding him, opening our hearts to his love, giving ourselves to his service, here below. Do you ask, what of the men who never knew Jesus Christ? It is sad to think of the world's groping for God. But how many of that vast multitude who have never heard his name are perhaps truly longing and striving after God, and, when the curtain of death is drawn, will for the first time see Him for whom they have yearned, and in beholding the face of Jesus Christ will know that redeeming love which with all their might they have sought but could not find! That little Japanese woman who told the story of her going out as a child into the garden in Japan to pray to the unknown God for the restoration of her sick mother to health, and who in gratitude because of that restora-

tion had loved him, though unknown, and carried his love in her heart, when she came to America and heard in a mission church the story of Jesus, and remained after the service and said to the leader, "Tell me of him, for I have loved him, and have worshiped him, though I never knew his name," is but the picture of others whom God alone can know, who will at last be seen in that great multitude out of every kindred, and nation, and clime, who shall sing the song of the redeemed and cry, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain; for he has redeemed us unto himself!"

When Jesus spoke of his Father's house with the many mansions and the prepared place, he also said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The word abides; the condition of attaining the heaven into which he has gone, the heaven of the pure in heart who see God, is to bring one's heart to him to be made pure, and to take up with him, even now, the life that is life indeed. It is a strait and narrow way, a way of honesty and self-denial, of purity and of truth, often a way of cross-bearing and of sacrifice, but a way of strength and joy and peace, a way out of darkness into ineffable light, a way open to you and me and whosoever will to-day!

VI

THE ESSENTIALS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.—I

“Neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you.”—LUKE 17. 21.

MEN are saying concerning religion that this, and that, is not essential. A belief in miracles, or the Virgin Birth, or the resurrection of Christ, or his divinity, or the doctrine of the Trinity, or the inspiration of the Scripture, is thus set aside, or held indifferent. And the statement is so frequently made that we are forced to ask, Are these, any or all, essential to faith?

Theoretically they certainly are not, for all are in one sense doctrines, and religion does not consist in the holding of theological opinions. Religion is an experience, an attitude of the soul. It is a life, the life of God in the soul of man, with character as its result. We like to think of this relation to God as direct and immediate, depending upon no external aid or intermediary; and this has been the contention ever since the great days of the Reformation, namely, that no priest, or church, or

sacrifice, or ceremonial, is necessary in order to bring the sinful and penitent soul into communication with his God, or to make sure to any such penitent the forgiveness of his sins which, through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, is freely offered to all the world. The test of the acceptance of this pardon and access to God is the subsequent life of the believer. No other test is satisfactory. The world is correct in its instinctive judgment. It holds that men are what they do. Whatever a man does he was capable of doing, and his deeds are inseparable from himself. As he thinks in his heart, so he does, and in the long run the outward life and the inward thought correspond, whatever a man's profession, or whatsoever appearance he may seek to preserve or put on before men. What is essential to a saving faith God alone can determine, for God alone knows the heart; and the truth concerning a man's heart can only be open to the all-seeing God, and to the man himself by so much as he is enlightened by the Spirit of God. According to the ancient phrase, "A man hath so much religion as he has between God and himself alone, and no more. What shows soever he makes before men." Far be it from us to attempt to determine what are the realities of that innermost relation of the soul to God.

Sufficient that to his own Master each man stands or falls.

But this is not all that is to be said. There are other questions that are important. How shall we get this saving faith? How shall we know it? How shall we impart it to others? For it is something that cannot be kept to oneself. One test of the reality of the possession is the desire to communicate it, that others may share in the blessing; and above all this, that it is that possession which increases only as it is shared with others about us.

We may compare ourselves with children before a well-spread table. There are all kinds of food upon it in abundance, and we are hungry and need the food. Those seem to be the two all-important facts. But time quickly shows that something more is necessary. There must be discrimination between what is food and what is not, and what is proper and what undesirable to eat, or we may make serious mistake; and when that is discovered it is too late to remedy it. We should know now, therefore, what are the essentials of a true faith, if there are any; and we should know them in a way to judge of their real value and of their inevitable effect.

Faith that is to point a man to God, which is the one fact of chief importance in every

man's life, cannot be a matter of chance. It is not a gamble, and it is not an accident. Nor can it be the possession, or gift, only of certain individuals, for God "made of one every nation of man to dwell on all the face of the earth," and we are all his children, made in his image, brought into being by the breath of his Spirit. Faith, like health, is a result of certain definite forces. It is intended to be a normal and universal experience, and life is so ordered that if men live a right life they shall not lack it. But it is to be understood that some things produce it and some do not.

This faith, that occupies so large a place in our thought, is the product of Christianity, and Christianity is an historic fact. It is not necessary to discuss Buddhism, or Brahmanism, or Confucianism, or Mohammedanism. These all have had their day, and have failed. At least they are not an immediate concern of the world in which we live and in which all our best conceptions of what life means are involved.

The East has much yet to give to the world. It cannot be otherwise than that the vast aggregation of humanity which has survived with so little change through the centuries, wrapped up in its own thought, working out its own remarkable career, should have, in God's good

time, much to contribute to the progress of the world. The attitude of the Occident to the Orient must greatly change in the not distant future and take on a respect far worthier both of its head and its heart than that which to-day controls our current opinion. But the contribution for which we may feel that the world is waiting is not to be of the religions of the Orient. The hope of the world is not in those faiths, but in the Christian faith, and the Master of the hearts of men to-day, and the sustainer of hope for the days to come, is not Mohammed, or Confucius, or Gautama Buddha, but is Jesus Christ.

We, then, are concerned only with the questions of the Christian faith because we know it as the best. So the question becomes, What are the essentials of the Christian faith? and the answer is at once, Faith in the truth of Christianity. Because Christianity is an historic faith this means faith in the facts on which Christianity rests.

It is inconceivable that this great historic force in the world, which we know as Christianity, should rest on myths or dreams or misconceptions. Is the real business of life in any department carried forward through the years on such things; and is there any business of life which is now or for two thousand years

has been comparable to Christianity? We have lately had the great Hudson-Fulton Centennial. Is it conceivable that if Hendrik Hudson and Robert Fulton were not real personages, that Centennial could have occurred? New York is here, in any case, you may well say. Somebody certainly would have discovered our great river and the beautiful harbor; and the providence of God makes it inevitable that such exceptional privileges and opportunities for human life would in time be taken advantage of, and the great city would appear lying between the two rivers; but would there have been any Hudson-Fulton Centennial? Imagine it for Diedrich Knickerbocker! The thought is preposterous. The great forces of life rest on facts, not on dreams. Life, at least, is a reality.

Primarily, then, the Christian religion is the religion of God as made known through Jesus Christ. To the Christian, Jesus Christ must be a true historic personality. He lived at a certain time; he was himself and not another; and he did and said certain things; all of which stand in essential relation to the Christian faith. Men may conceive a different story; and men of all grades of intelligence have busied themselves with describing a form of religion to serve their purpose, and in their

view to be an improvement on the Christian religion, while omitting more or less of the Christian story, or dispensing with it altogether. This is any man's privilege, and he may justly call it a religion; but it is not the Christian religion, whatever other name may properly be given to it.

Furthermore, we can know Jesus Christ only through the Christian story. God may reveal himself directly to any man, and we know that God does so through every variety of human experience. Temptation, and sorrow, and sickness, and loss, and sometimes sheer loneliness or weariness of life, and sometimes fullness of blessings, serve to open a man's heart and enable him to hear the voice of God. God has not left himself without witness, and can find ways of access to the human soul that lie far beyond our ken. But when God has found such access, and a heart that has been closed to him is softened and a new life has begun; when to that soul is presented the story of Jesus Christ, it at once recognizes him as the revealer of the Father, in a larger and fuller and more abiding way than hitherto it had known. He becomes at once the Guide and Master, the Teacher and the Sanctifier of that soul, and the more completely it surrenders itself to the inspiration of God, the

more completely is it satisfied with a personal surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul stands in the New Testament story as the vivid illustration of this process. An enemy of Jesus Christ, bitter in his antagonism, he suddenly receives a communication from God. In what form and by what channel is of no consequence. It is sufficient that he found himself arrested in his course. The "still small voice" which through the ages has from time to time spoken to men who were ready to hear was heard in his inmost soul. He found himself stopped in his career and summoned to a new and wholly different life. Immediately we see him turning for instruction to those who could tell him about Jesus Christ; and as the story of Christ was opened to him and the person of Christ made real he moved out upon that new career which has made him the greatest of the Christian disciples.

This, then, becomes an abiding and universal test of the Christian faith as an actual possession in any man's heart. He who has it approves its reality and is confirmed both in the peace and in the grace which it bestows by the completeness of his union in spirit and in life with Jesus Christ.

What, then, is essential to the Christian

faith? We speak now only of those things about which there can be no dispute. Matters which are a subject of difference of opinion, and concerning which men must necessarily be left to judge for themselves when the facts have properly been placed before them, must be reserved to another chapter. For the present it suffices to concern ourselves with what is beyond question.

It is unmistakably essential to the Christian faith that a man believe in the validity of Christianity as exhibited in the world to-day. Men are not concerned with dead things, or even with those that are dying; and unless a man recognizes that Christianity is neither the one nor the other, that it has a vital force and is a moving power in the world in which we live, he cannot think it worthy of his consideration, and he certainly is not in the way of possessing what may be called a Christian faith.

The evidences of this validity are not far to seek. Christianity can be seen actually changing the lives of men, and that not in one condition of life or another, but in all lands and with all classes of people. Everywhere it inspires and supports goodness. And the more completely men surrender themselves to the Christian faith, the more completely do their

lives give evidence of what the world is everywhere ready to recognize as the true Christian life, a life of purity and honesty and simplicity and self-denial. Only where men bear his name lightly is it found in other forms; and then the accusation lies not against Christianity, but against the men who are insincere in their profession.

Furthermore, it makes God known; it brings God to men and men to God actually. For where Christianity controls the lives of men, that control appears in a well-ordered life, in comfort, in peace, in a true humanity and brotherhood, and in a progress definite, hopeful, and established, such as is not elsewhere to be seen.

Moreover, it helps on all that is best in men and in life. After all the centuries in which civilization again and again has appeared only to be destroyed, the world to-day finds its hope centered in Christianity. The deliverance of the oppressed, the uplifting of the degraded, the inspiring of the ignorant, the care of the sick and the helpless, the overcoming of the force of evil, whether in government or in the hearts of men—in short, the progress of the world in all that is best for humanity as a whole or for the individual—rests on Christianity. This has been its work in the past,

even in the face of all the obstacles which have been deeply established in human history, with its stories of aggression, its antagonism of race and of class, its insatiable greed of gain, its pestilences and its famines, its ambitions and its vices. As Christianity spreads its influence and strengthens its control the hope of the world grows more assured. We believe that a better day is coming and that the world is indeed advancing in proportion as our faith in Christ is established.

And this force is by no means exhausted. Its gospel is as efficient for any man, anywhere, and for every people under whatever conditions, as it ever was.

This, then, is what Christianity is in the world to-day; and, because it is this, belief in its validity as a life-giving force given from God to men may properly be regarded as starting with the acceptance of this fact. Actually it becomes a personal appeal to us only as we individually become cognizant of it in some man in whom we see it as the regenerating force in his life. We are won to Christ and to Christianity only as we are persuaded that Jesus Christ is the ruler in the heart of our friend, and as the Christianity which is presented to us for our acceptance is revealed in the life of him who standing before us bears

the Christian name. No man can be persuaded of any faith which is not so embodied. "By their fruits ye shall know them" is the abiding principle; and the challenge of Christianity is based on the validity of the Christian faith as witnessed in the spirits and the lives of those who bear the Christian name. If that should cease to be genuine and commanding there would be no Christian faith in the world. Because there is in all lands such a multitude of humble, faithful, earnest, and genuine followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, the acceptance of that testimony to the reality of his religion is the initial step for the man who would believe to-day.

In the second place, an essential of the Christian faith is the belief in the substantial accuracy of the historic documents on which Christianity rests, and through which it has been promulgated; that is, the Scriptures of the New Testament. These documents are to be tested and judged as any other historic documents are; they have always been so tested, and they are so tested to-day—more thoroughly, indeed, than ever before. There always have been questions raised as to some of these documents, the Epistle of James, of Second Peter, and the Revelation, for example. And all at any time may be exposed to such ques-

tioning. But Christianity to-day rests on their substantial historic accuracy.

This means that those who call themselves Christians, and who feel charged with the duty and privilege of presenting the faith which they hold to others, have a right to believe that the story of the beginnings of that faith, and of the person and work of Him who is in himself the center and the life of the faith, and the interpretations of his life and work as given by those who were his immediate followers, which have been cherished by the Church from the beginning, are so far genuine and accurate that they may be accepted as a sufficient authority for the historic facts on which their personal faith rests.

They have tested these teachings in their individual lives, and have found that in proportion as they have heeded them the reality of their understanding of Jesus Christ, their sense of his living presence, and their access to God have strengthened and become assured. Therefore we are justified in saying that an acceptance of the historic documents of Christianity, as presenting with substantial accuracy the truths of Christianity, is essential to an acceptance of the Christian faith.

It is not sufficient to spiritualize the Christian story, saying, as some do, that one need

pay no attention to the narrative, provided he has in his heart a spiritual apprehension of God or of the truth of religion. A man may have that and yet not be justified in calling himself a Christian, for the reasons we have given.

It is not enough for a man to say, "I accept the Sermon on the Mount," and to think, because of that, he is a follower of Jesus Christ; for Jesus Christ was not simply a teacher or a prophet. He did not come expounding a principle or promulgating a method of life. In that case the principle and the method remain and have all the value that may be inherent in them, regardless of the source from which they came, or the person who promulgated them. The command of Christ was not, "Accept my teaching," or, "Follow my method"; but, "Accept me," and, "Follow me"; and only as men do that are they worthy to be called his disciples.

Therefore, the third essential of Christianity of which we may speak is to believe in Jesus Christ himself, as he is presented in the New Testament. For the person and the work of Christ are the core of Christianity; and the one question to the would-be believer is, Does his faith hold to him, or does it not? Before all else a Christian is a man who knows Jesus

Christ, one to whom he is a reality, a personal friend, a helper, a Saviour, one to be loved and longed for, one to serve now with joy, and to be looked for in the other life as the supreme reward. The Christian is before all else a man who has given himself to Christ. He accepts him as he is accepted by him. He lives not for himself; but Christ Jesus lives in him. To that man life is a service of Christ, and death is but the drawing back of the curtain which separates a sinful man from the Holy God whom he has learned to know and to love through the revelation of him that has been made in the Saviour who sought him and found him and gave his life to redeem him. These are indisputable essentials of a Christian faith. There may be religion without them, but certainly not the Christian religion.

VII

THE ESSENTIALS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.—II

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures.”—1 CORINTHIANS 15. 3, 4.

To know the essentials of the Christian faith we must first know what is the Christian faith. We come, then, from general considerations to the specific facts.

Here is the earliest form in which that faith was announced. It is indisputably authentic, for this Corinthian letter of the apostle Paul is one of the four writings of the New Testament which have never been seriously questioned. It antedates even the Gospels. Harnack gives its probable date as the year 52 or 53; that is, within about twenty years of the death of our Lord. It was written without doubt from Ephesus, to which the apostle had come after two years of patient work in the great city of Corinth, where he had lived supporting himself at his trade of a tentmaker, while he gath-

ered a little group of followers, both Jews and Gentiles, and formed there a Christian church. He crossed to Ephesus, only to learn soon after that dissensions had broken out in Corinth. It perhaps was not to be wondered at. The Christian community was too new and made up of too diverse elements thoroughly to fuse, even under the passion of the new love in their hearts.

But Paul's grief was none the less keen, and he writes to them this letter, in which, in chapter after chapter, he rebukes and argues and pleads with them that he may reestablish them promptly in that imitation of Christ and obedience to Christ in which he had found his own new life. He cares little that they question his personal authority, but it broke his heart to think that they were, under any excuse, departing from following Jesus Christ as the one source of their life, and their one sufficient authority. He had come to them solely as the messenger of Jesus Christ, bearing his gospel, and he hastens now to declare what that gospel was and what is the real ground of his own authority. It is fundamental both to his work and to their faith, and he would have no misunderstanding about it. There has been no change in his preaching. He says: "I make known unto you, brethren,

the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain." Then he proceeds in the words of the text, in which he recounts the simple facts concerning Jesus Christ as one who came and died for our sins according to the scriptures, and rose again, as was abundantly witnessed.

This, then, is sufficient for our purpose. We recall the phrase from the French, "It is not possible to love and hope for that which one does not believe"; and we are justified in saying that the essentials of the Christian faith are obviously belief in Jesus Christ, as Paul knew him; that is, as he is presented in the Scriptures.

Beyond question men may find God otherwise, as they have done in the past. But any man having done so will inevitably be himself found of Jesus Christ. The union of the soul that in any way finds God, with Jesus Christ, when the two are brought together, is immediate; and the Christian faith is the faith of those who anywhere or at any time, having found God, find him most truly and most perfectly presented in his Son, our Lord. And having so found him themselves, they take the

story of Christ, or, as we call it, the gospel of Christ, as the message which God has given them by which to lead others to the same blessed experience.

With this as the central and comprehensive truth we may now properly examine it, and ask what may be regarded as the essentials of this faith.

Manifestly the first of these is the belief that Jesus was a real person. In the very earliest days of the propagation of the gospel this was questioned. It was quite in the line of the thought and temper of the times to imagine that any new doctrine or movement of men might be attributed to some ghostly or spiritual appearance, and the Church had the early duty of establishing its contention that this assumption had no place in its message or in its history. We are so much further away from those primitive days that it is still easier to question the historic truth, and there are those, from time to time, who advance such a suggestion.

But the answer is twofold. Christianity has to be accounted for; and the figure in the gospel is its own evidence. Christianity is the great fact in the world's history to-day, and is as vital as it ever was. It cannot be ignored; and it is inconceivable that this

great system, so full of an energy which shows no suggestion of either diminished force or impaired effectiveness, should rest upon a lie, or should have its spring and origin in a tradition or a ghostly appearance. Furthermore, the picture of Jesus given to us in the gospel is one that it would be impossible to create if it did not exist. Saintliness is the most difficult of all types of character to depict; and the higher the type of sainthood the more shadowy and impersonal it inevitably becomes. John Stuart Mill's question still stands: "Who among the disciples of Jesus, or among their proselytes, was capable of inventing these sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee, and certainly not Saint Paul." The reality of that Person and that character may therefore properly be regarded as an essential fact of the Christian faith.

Again, as such a real personage Jesus constitutes not *a* revelation but *the* revelation of God. This means that Jesus stands by himself. He is not a product of Judaism, nor of his time, nor of evolution. He was born of Jewish parentage in Palestine and at a definite date, but nothing is more indisputable than that he was not a Jew in any immediate

sense; nor did he belong to any one time, or period, or race. In two thousand years the world has greatly changed, and men's knowledge and range of thought and apparatus of criticism have all become extensive and definite. But it never was more certain than it is to-day that Jesus Christ is for all men everywhere. He speaks directly to the human heart, and in terms which are as truly pertinent to the scholar as to the peasant, to the Occident to which his gospel has come as to the Orient to which he historically belongs.

Nor is he a product of the evolution of the natural world. His physical body might be such a product, as were his clothes. That we do not know, and that we cannot conceive to be essential; but he himself was certainly not such a product. All such products we describe as natural. He was supernatural. The Christian faith maintains that he came into this world from outside the world, to make God known to men living here, as God otherwise had not been known and could not be known.

In the year 1872, immediately after the fall of the Second Empire in France, the Protestant Synod, which had been suppressed for more than two hundred years, reassembled under the new Republic. Freedom of religion was to be permitted, and the scattered French

Protestants, of an historic and noble ancestry, felt themselves called to proclaim their existence and to establish their Church for its proper work in their own country. It was at once necessary for them to define their position, and the question arose, "What constitutes the Christian faith? Is a man who believes in God a Christian?" Some stood for that—that is, for a deistic Christianity, holding that if a man has what he regards as a joyous faith in God, that is enough. But inevitably the question was put, "Is there or is there not a supernatural revelation of God? Yes or no. Has God created, loved, and saved us by his Son? If so, is this compatible with its contradictory? If Christianity is a supernatural revelation of God, it is not a product of the human reason, even though it be regarded as the supreme product. There are no shades or degrees there. The proposition is either wholly true or wholly false." After long debating on the highest possible plane and with the sole purpose of making it clear to the world what Christianity is, this affirmation was accepted and defined as the only Christian position. It would seem that this is the only one which is justifiable to-day.

Furthermore, Jesus appears a unique personality in that he is sinless. Of this, of

course, it is impossible for history to give an absolute demonstration; but there is no mistake in seeing in the record that this was the impression that he made upon all who came in contact with him. From the beginning to the end of his recorded life he moves always on that plane. There is an undeniable but definite and real gulf between him and his most intimate disciples. The more intimate he is with them, and the longer they are in his company, the more manifest this becomes; until in the closing hours, especially as recorded in the conversations in the Gospel of John, and, in all the Gospels in the scenes connected with Gethsemane and Calvary, a whole world of existence seems to lie between him and them. His prayer is, "Father, forgive them!" never once, "Father, forgive me!" In him prayer never is supplication, but always communion.

This sinless character of Jesus has never been successfully questioned. Now and again someone has attempted to disparage it in some particular, but such criticism has never secured even a respectful hearing. Instinctively the world has recognized that there is something irreverent, if not sacrilegious, in it. That character stands so beautiful in its perfection that men seem to feel that even the suggestion of a fleck on its purity or a flaw in its perfect

simplicity would be an irreparable loss of that which could not be replaced and which the world long since learned to regard as its chiefest treasure. Jesus was this which the evangelists described him to be, and which the world has found itself ready to believe that he was, or he was inexplicable. If he were not this his words are absurd and arrogant. For he said, "Come unto me, and live!" "Follow me, and find life!" "Take my yoke upon you, and enter into peace!" If he were not himself sinless he cannot save any man. The world's condition would be hopeless, and the Christian faith would have already encountered its inevitable defeat.

Furthermore, Jesus was possessed of powers corresponding to his nature and his claims. His spiritual power is the greatest of all. Professor Bruce said, "A sinless Christ is as great a miracle as a Christ who can walk on the water." Jesus said, "The Father has life in himself." This being the source of life is the nature of God. He then added, "The Father hath given to the Son to have life in himself." In so saying he proclaimed the possession of power that men have not.

What the measure of that power was, and what were the conditions within which it was to be exercised, we cannot determine. It is

enough that coming as he did, the revelation of God, he claimed and exercised powers that pertained to that relationship. And there can be no reasonable question, other than such as is simply historical, as to what powers he exercised, and what he did not; and when the historical question is settled, if it ever should be, there would still remain the altogether unsettled question as to what powers he might have exercised in harmony with his nature and his mission, had he had occasion to do so. The argument from the natural improbability of the appearance of any person on this earth possessed of such power fails at once and completely before the evidence we have, and the facts on which Christianity rests, that Jesus Christ, in the very nature of the case, and by virtue of what he was, possessed powers that were appropriate to himself.

Furthermore, his death was voluntary and sacrificial. In the Christian faith the death of Jesus Christ occupies a central place, as declared by the text. That that death was both voluntary and sacrificial is the burden of the whole story. Jesus saw it coming long before he surrendered to it; and he accepted it for the sake of the world. His earliest message was, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him

should not perish, but have eternal life." And his final prayer was, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

This sacrificial death of Jesus Christ is the central truth taken up by his disciples, and ever since maintained by his Church. The historian tells us that it was the sacrament of the Last Supper, the whole significance of which lies in its relation to the death of Jesus Christ, that through the early centuries held the church to its faith and made its life both united and true to its mission. Sir Oliver Lodge, in a recent address in Birmingham, said that in the course of the evolutionary process in nature there came a time when knowledge of good and evil arrived, with power of choice. Then man tripped and fell. Whether that be called a fall or a rise will differ with the point of view. But then, "Christ realizing that men were blundering, laid aside his majesty, and lived on our planet as a teacher." This is the declaration of a man of science. It is sufficient as witnessing to the fact that there came a time in human history when man needed something done for him which he could not do for himself. Sir Oliver seems to think that he has sufficiently described what Jesus did by saying that he came as a teacher. The Christian Church has never been content to

say that. Its message is that he came as a Saviour. He not only told men what the kingdom of God is, but he made it possible for them to enter it. He did that without which all teaching of the kingdom would have been to leave the world all the more hopeless in its despair before the picture of a life that to it had become no longer possible. It was Jesus' sacrificial death, and his resurrection following upon it, which made the teachings of his word and the morality of his life at once an inspiration and a possibility. This, and nothing short of this, is the gospel. The Christian accepts it, and rejoices in Jesus Christ as his Saviour; and he turns to the world inviting it to accept the faith which rests on this as its immovable foundation.

Finally, an essential of the Christian faith is the belief that Jesus Christ is not dead, but is living to-day. He is not an influence, but a Saviour; not a memory, but a friend, one to bring us to God and to eternal life, a very present help in every time of need.

Some say that men can save themselves if they would. Some say the sense of guilt is a superstition. Some say remorse is a morbid passion; and still some others, that divine intervention is inconceivable. The Christian replies to one and all: "I know Jesus Christ.

He has helped me to know God and to know myself. He has sought and found me, and having found me has helped me to find myself, and through him to find God. And now he is with me to assure my pardon, to guide my life, to strengthen my purpose, and to strengthen me in the effort to work out a growing Christian character, until, as he has promised, I shall be complete in his likeness, and shall see him as he is. This is my gospel, that Christ is my Saviour."

Forty years ago Dr. Dale, in his presidential address to the Congregational Union of England, said: "Here is the real issue. Is Christendom to believe in Christ or not? It is a battle in which everything is to be lost or won. It is not a theory of ecclesiastical policy that is in danger; it is not a theological system, it is not a creed, it is not the Old Testament or the New, but the claim of Christ himself to be the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind."

I think we are justified in saying that the faith of Jesus as embracing these substantial truths concerning Jesus is one of the essentials of the Christian teaching. It is to be held and taught by those who regard themselves Christians. It should be the substance of the appeal to those who are not Christians,

and we may well believe that it is the foundation of the standing or falling of the Christian Church, and the truth for the winning of men everywhere to God and to life.

Dr. E. H. Sears, the Unitarian, in a beautiful book entitled "The Heart of Christ," writes these words: "Those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as the supreme authority and guide, and enter more and more into his all-revealing mind, are making progress toward the harmonizing truths which he represents. It is not that one sect is making conquests of the others, but Jesus Christ is making conquest of us all."

VIII

THE ESSENTIALS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.—III

“If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain.”—1 CORINTHIANS 15. 14.

THE Christian faith is based on a miracle, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Back of that is a still greater miracle, the person and work of Jesus Christ himself. The Christian accepts Jesus as Saviour and Lord. To him he is not a product of nature, but is from above. He does for man what only God can do. If a miracle is an event not to be accounted for in nature, Jesus is a miracle, and so much of belief in miracles is an essential of the Christian faith.

For a man to say, “I do not believe in any kind of a miracle,” is to set himself against Christianity; not necessarily against religion or against God, but against that particular form of religion and that particular presentation of God which is the substance of Christianity. He may present a scheme of religion which he labels Christian. It may rest upon a description of Jesus that is harmonious with

the man's own conception of nature and of God, but it is not the Jesus of the New Testament, and cannot be regarded as a substitute for the historic Christian faith.

To deny the possibility of miracles, and, therefore, to decline to consider evidence adduced in support of them, is a very old form of attack upon Christianity. But with the modern advance of science and the clearer thinking which has come to prevail in the scientific world, no less than in the general realm of culture, it may now be truthfully said that it is unphilosophical to say that miracles are impossible. So generally is this proposition accepted among scholars that it may be declared a general truth. Men differ now only as to the nature of the evidence that is necessary to prove that any particular event is miraculous. The thinking world recognizes that the limitation of man's knowledge makes it manifestly impossible for him to say that any event claimed to occur in the natural world lies beyond the possibility of divine power. Though so much has been gained in the knowledge of nature, the effect has been to widen the realm of the unknown; and the ancient doctrine that all things are possible to God was never more universally accepted and never was better established, than it is to-day.

The question whether the belief in miracles is essential in the Christian faith can be best answered by dividing miracles into three classes: the miracle of the Resurrection; the miracle of the Incarnation, including the question of the Virgin Birth; and the group of miracles which Jesus is recorded as having wrought.

The Church holds, and always has held, that on the third day after the crucifixion Jesus reappeared on earth, an unimpaired personality. For the Church his grave has always stood with an open door, and is an empty tomb. That empty tomb is the enduring monument of his final and complete victory over death. Furthermore, the Church holds that in this lies the proof of Jesus's real nature. His dominion over the physical world is so complete that all questions as to what became of his material body, or how, to use Paul's term, for him "the terrestrial" passed into "the celestial," are as unimportant as they are insolvable. They belong to the things which are not revealed. But the fact of that transition is as unquestioningly accepted by the Church as is the reality of that life into which the faith of Jesus introduces the believer.

The resurrection of Jesus is also to the Church the proof of the resurrection of the be-

liever through him. He is henceforth the Lord of life for this world and for the next. This the early Church held as amply proved. Paul recounts in this fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians the outline of the evidence which he made the historic basis of his message. Jesus had appeared after his death to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to above five hundred brethren at once, then to James, then to all the apostles, and, last of all, to him also. The Church accepted the evidence, not simply because it was so abundant and so accessible on the lips of those who were still living, but perhaps much more because of the reality of the new life which was witnessed in every convert. It was the reality of that new life wrought in the hearts and conduct of his followers that became to the world the appeal and the proof of the new faith. The ever-present testimony in the existing monuments of the early Christian world is of this faith in the resurrection of the dead. "Because he lives, we shall live also," was their triumphant cry. The most notable critic of the Christian faith in the last century said, "It was the belief in the resurrection that gave permanence and authority to the precepts of Jesus; otherwise they would have been blown away and scattered like leaves before the wind." Recog-

nizing this, and too honest to deny it, Ferdinand Baur, because he held that a miracle is impossible, said, "The problem of the resurrection of Christ must be regarded as insolvable." The Christian believer crowds the indisputable fact back upon the preconceived theory as to miracle, and confidently expects the theory to be abandoned.

In the language of Dean Church: "The Christian Church is founded on a definite historic fact, that Jesus Christ who was crucified rose from the dead. A so-called Christianity, ignoring and playing with Christ's resurrection, and using the Bible as a sort of Homer, may satisfy a class of clever and cultivated persons. But it is well in so serious a matter not to confuse things. This new religion may borrow from Christianity as it may borrow from Plato, or from Buddhism, or Confucius, or even Islam. But it is not Christianity. A Christianity which tells us to think of Christ doing good, but to forget and put out of sight Christ risen from the dead, is not true to life. It is as delusive to the conscience and the soul as it is illogical to reason."

As to the Incarnation, the Christian Church holds that Jesus Christ came into our life from without, but in a real sense became man. He bears our sins and carries our sorrows, be-

cause he is one with us. It has speculated much and long over the question of the union of the divine and the human; but it has reached no conclusion, and, perhaps it may be said, has gained no light. That is another of the hidden things of God. The questioning mind of man may always stand before it with reverent inquiry. But the unanswered question concerning the method does not impinge upon or disturb the acceptance of the fact upon which so much that is most real in the Christian faith and the Christian life depends. We certainly are justified in saying that the belief in the incarnation of Jesus Christ is essential to the Christian faith.

It will at once be asked, How will this affect the question of the Virgin Birth? There are those who reject that on two grounds: first, because they think that then Jesus would not be truly man; and, second, in their view the record is not sufficiently authentic. To this we may make reply that we cannot say that the doctrine is essential, because if the record were discredited, or, indeed, entirely removed from the gospel story, it would not follow that the foundations of the Christian faith were disturbed, or that the Church would not go on its way unaffected. But the Church accepts the narrative as it stands and holds to

its faith in the historic event undisturbed, for the following reasons: It is entirely harmonious with the nature of Jesus Christ. That nature is so exceptional that Jesus's entrance into our life might well be attended with circumstances or conducted in a way that would be unique, and the declaration of the immediate agency of the Spirit of God is certainly not inharmonious, but, on the contrary, is most congruous with what we know and rejoice to believe as to the divinity of our Lord. Furthermore, the Church cannot fail to note that repudiation of the story is largely limited to those who repudiate what the Church believes as to the real nature of the Person of Christ. Denial of the Virgin Birth is most often connected with denial of the virgin life of our Lord. Moreover, such denial leads to an intolerable suggestion, that of Professor Cheyne in the "Encyclopædia Biblica," where he says, "The name of the father of Jesus is, to say the least, extremely uncertain." The bare suggestion this implies is shocking. Finally, the Church recognizes that the narratives of the Immaculate Conception are an undisputed section of the Gospels, and that there is nothing in the narrative that is inharmonious with the description of Jesus that is everywhere found in the Epistles. The com-

pleteness of the recognition of his divine nature may well be regarded as intimately connected in the minds of the writers with their faith in his supernatural birth.

We come, then, to the group of miracles which Jesus is recorded as having wrought. No one of them, certainly, is essential to the Christian faith; that is, the narrative of our Lord's earthly life and teaching would remain substantially unchanged if any one of them were not there. The opening of the eyes of the blind, the healing of the sick, the feeding of the multitude, the calling to life of the widow's son, or the raising of Lazarus, might conceivably be removed from the record, and, great as would be the loss, the story would not be seriously injured, nor the Christian faith affected. In each instance it may be admitted that faith in the individual event properly depends upon the evidence of its historic character. The Christian faith certainly does not rest upon any one of these recorded miracles.

But that is not the real question. We are reminded of the famous horsetail argument of the old rhetoricians: "This single hair does not make the tail; I pull it out. This one does not make the tail; I pull that out. I continue with each separate hair. At last, where is the tail?" We may dispense with individual

miracles, but the miracles as a whole are wrought into the web of the gospel, and they cannot be removed from it without the destruction of the picture of Christ, and the historic foundations of the gospel. The Church believes in the miracles that Jesus wrought because it believes that he was able to work them; because they were natural to him and suitable to the task he had to perform; because they accomplished his purpose, challenging the attention of the world which he needed and which he could not otherwise secure; because they attested that revelation which he was in himself, and which he delivered in his words, and which furthermore disclosed itself in his wonderful deeds; because his story would be more strange without them than it is with them; for such a person to come into our life for the purpose for which he came, and not to manifest powers above and outside of those which men recognize as pertaining to the natural world, would be far stranger than for him to disclose the powers which Jesus so naturally, so quietly, and so effectively used. We agree with Dr. Dale: "That Christ should have worked miracles does not surprise me. It would have surprised me if he had not."¹

¹Living Christ and Gospel, p. 102.

We say with truth: "We do not want the miracles which saints have wrought, but the miracle through which the saint himself is made." Because Jesus wrought this great miracle, and lives to work it to-day in the heart of every penitent coming to him seeking grace that he may become a saint, we are ready to believe that he not only has the power to do this, but that also, on occasion, he did exercise, and can again exercise, all power that may be related to his beneficent purpose.

Having said this, we say with John Calvin, "So long as the central truths of Christianity are held intact, differences of opinion are to be allowed." We would not lay unnecessary burdens upon any man's faith, but we seek to open the way and set up the landmarks which will enable the humblest soul to come straight to his Lord, and, having come, to know what the Christian faith is, and how to make it known to others.

We have only to ask, then, What are the great central truths?

The first is that we live in a world of mystery. This was never so true and so nobly impressive as it is to-day. Science has opened vast realms of new knowledge, but in every instance it has been to disclose a vaster mystery lying beyond. The conception of the in-

finite and of the infinitesimal, of an all-embracing ether, the idea of an all-prevailing unity, of the limitless areas of time and space, of the indestructibility of all existence, of the ceaseless change of life and death, of construction and destruction in the universe, create a sense of mystery and of awe hitherto unknown, but are now forced upon us with a new and commanding significance because they are now scientific.

We recognize in every direction that our intellectual faculties are not adequate to solve the problems that crowd upon us. We have to fall back for our knowledge upon the consciousness of possessing powers of apprehension outside the realm of logic. The truth comes in upon us through many channels. We reach the decisions which are necessary for the conduct of life and for the building of character by ways we often cannot determine. It is sufficient for us to know that they have the quality of truth. They serve our purpose. They enable us to do our work. They help us to something of permanence in right ways, and to solidity in the peace that possesses our hearts. They serve to secure for us what we are glad to recognize as an established faith. Religion comes with an appeal to this power of the soul. We can discern our own needs.

We can search and try ourselves. We can feel the burden of a sinful heart and the guilt both of the transgression that has passed and of the passion that led to it. We can ask God's forgiveness and believe that he hears and will answer. When out of the mystery that surrounds us there comes the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, there is that in us which responds to it. We can believe and find light.

Therefore the second great truth which may be regarded as central is that Jesus Christ stands alone as the revealer of God and the Saviour of men. He is the great fact to-day. He is the final and absolute revelation of God to man. When John Wesley lay dying, after a long silence, he opened his eyes and asked, "What was the text on which I preached last Sunday?" and when one standing by repeated, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty may be rich," he said, "Yes, that's it. That is the only foundation. There is no other."

Finally, we must yield to him, we must open our hearts to the faith that centers in him, if we would find forgiveness and live. Multitudes have done so. Many whom we have known and loved have walked with him, have

kept the faith, and to-day are singing the song of the redeemed. There never were so many in the world holding this faith and living that life as there are to-day. The greatest of all miracles is a new heart. The changing of a mind from unbelief to belief, from darkness concerning itself and concerning God to light that shall grow and illumine both the soul and God more and more; the breaking of the fetters of vice; the making of the harsh loving, the selfish generous and kind, the dishonest trustworthy and true, is the work that only the Spirit of God can do. That rebirth of the soul that lies back of all this, you and I must have. If we have it at last as God's free gift we must come and seek it with penitent heart. We must be willing to give up all things for it. The appeal of the Christian faith is thus a personal one. It brings Jesus Christ within the reach of every man, and it makes essential in the faith of Jesus those, and only those, truths concerning him which are the unchanging and sufficient foundation of a living faith. These we can confidently press upon every man.

IX

WHY NOT SIMPLY THE MORALITY OF JESUS?

“And as he was going forth into the way, there ran one to him, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good save one, even God.”—MARK 10. 17, 18.

THERE is a story of Lockhart, Walter Scott’s son-in-law and biographer, writing in a lady’s album :

“In Fancy’s days Hope’s fervid gaze
O’er Life’s fresh circuit ran:
And Faith, like Hope, found ample scope
Within this world of man.
But now my creed, from nonsense freed,
In three short items lies—
That nothing’s new, and nothing’s true,
And nothing signifies!”

This is a sufficiently accurate description of conditions to-day. There is so much that is new, and so much that is claimed to be true, and so much that was thought true that now is known to be untrue, that men find it easy to sweep all credence aside. Doctrine is little esteemed. Convictions are looked upon

as unintelligent, if not vulgar; and the hallmark of culture is a gentle but well-satisfied agnosticism in regard to all things outside of one's own special line of occupation or training. The unspoken motto that governs many lives is, "Let us live wisely"—with the emphasis on the "live"; at least, "Let us live well." If we must have teaching that lays down rules, and gives us maxims, and appeals to life, let it be restricted to ethical culture. When we go beyond that and discuss the requirements of religion we become narrow and dogmatic. Jowett, the Master of Balliol, reflecting the rationalistic spirit of his times, said, "It is impossible to have a personal affection for Jesus Christ because he lived two thousand years ago." And this in the face of the testimony of the Christian centuries, from Polycarp in the second century, who exclaimed in his martyrdom: "How can I blaspheme him, my Lord and Saviour? Eighty and six years I have served him and he has never injured me. How can I blaspheme my King who saves me?" to the last dying believer, even though it was the little lad who the other day on his deathbed said, "Mamma, I love you, but you know I love Him most."

The question is continually put, Why not the morality of Jesus without his personal

claims? Where it is not expressed in words it is the attitude of a multitude of cultivated, upright, and altogether respectable and amiable people on every side.

The first reply must be our Lord's answer. He will have none of it. Our text speaks to us with all the vividness of Mark's graphic details. One came running to him. Jesus, beholding him, loved him. To the eager question, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" the answer is, "Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God."

The end of our Lord's ministry was at hand. He was on the way to the last Passover. He had just interrogated his disciples at Cæsarea Philippi as to the people's opinion and their thought about himself, and had spoken the words to Peter that were to become imperishable in regard to his testimony to him as the Son of God. Already the shadow of the cross is upon him, and he talks of his death which he is to accomplish at Jerusalem. The light-minded multitude are forsaking him because he refused to accept their thoughtless adoration when they wanted to make him a king. Even his disciples are soon to desert him with denials and betrayal. He says: "I am not alone. My Father is with me. My Father is greater than I. I and my Father are one."

The wedding garment, which was to furnish the supreme test in admission to the feast, in the parable, was a gift, and not an earned acquisition, or a desert, and was the picture and type of the condition under which alone his Father was to give admission to the heavenly kingdom; and he was soon to say, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." His attitude was becoming like that of a king marching to his triumph and distributing kingly gifts the values of which were little understood, but which would soon become in the hearts and lives of his followers the pledge of his coming again, and their eternal reward in his presence. Never for a moment does he relax or modify his demands or his personal claims. His word always is, "Forsake all, and follow me!" "Come unto me, and live!" "Take my yoke!" "Be my disciple!" "Obey me if you would find life!" It is utterly impossible to read his story and be uncertain as to his claims, which remain unchanged to-day. It is Christ himself as the Saviour of the world, or it is nothing.

In the next place, as a matter of fact it is impossible to accept the morality of Christ and neglect him. For these reasons: Every such emasculated ethics lacks dynamic. It seems to have power, and sometimes is impos-

ing in its pretenses. Like the continued revolution of the great flywheel of an engine after the steam has been shut off, it is showy, but on its way to utter ineffectiveness. Any scheme of morals is worth nothing, as Carlyle says, that cannot show its effectiveness in work; and any scheme of morals that rests solely on a utilitarian basis, or on its appeal to the human reason, or on the strength of human resolution, is sure to fail. Time runs against it. It has no propagating power; the weakness of the flesh and the weariness of age destroy eventually even its appearance of vitality. When religion has attempted, as it has done not infrequently, to base Christianity on a scheme of practical morals without the sanction of personal allegiance to Jesus Christ, it has quickly developed conditions under which Christianity itself disappears. Bishop Butler tells of the condition of the London pulpits in his day when the Deism of the eighteenth century prevailed. He said one could not tell from anything he heard whether the preacher was a Mohammedan, a Buddhist, or a Confucian. We have the testimony of the historian of the eighteenth century that the "ages in which morality is most preached are the times in which it is least practiced." And we have about us in every modern capital a

refined society in its highly developed æsthetic and luxurious condition displaying a depth of corruption against which its culture is proving absolutely no protection.

A morality without the sanction of a personal faith is sure to breed Phariseeism. It makes one always conscious of his own superiority. We know just how good we are, and just how we became so. Our message becomes simply, "Do as I do. If you do not, you are by so much less worthy." We have before us the picture of Benjamin Franklin with his little card and his pin, pricking each day a hole to mark his practice of the several virtues, with his growing self-sufficiency; and then his weakness before the temptations of the French capital. It is the mark of a culture which, in proportion as it becomes exquisite and refined, becomes self-satisfied and remote. It looks out upon a vulgar world from which it holds itself growingly aloof. It is characterized by the increasing intensity both of its aloofness and of its self-sufficiency, until it becomes so manifestly separate from the spirit of Christ and the teachings of Christ that, at the end, it has no hope in Christ, and dies, when it does, wrapped about in its own defiant pride which it tries in vain to make a substitute for peace.

Moreover, such morality does not deliver one from his own past. Two facts are sure to become true of us all. There is in every heart, however smooth and protected the outer life, the double consciousness of sin and of weakness. These are not always recognized, but they are sure in time to declare themselves. Not one of us is what he should be. We know it as everyone knows it of us. And no moral code, however complete or however beautiful, can eradicate this consciousness. It lies in wait for us all, as life advances. It is sure to meet us before the bar of God. And in that day, when the books are opened, no peace of the soul, passing out of this life to the other, that rests solely upon what a man has made of himself, will satisfy. We need something that goes far deeper into our experience, and gives larger promise of delivering us from our own past. That no man can find in a mere code of morals.

But if we succeeded with our Christian code, as we will call it, freed from the personal claims of Jesus Christ, it would not satisfy us. At best it would only be the performance of a duty, and we all long for love. Ruskin has said that "a man is never so great as when he looks up to one nobler than himself"; and we need that inspiration and that help if we

would come into the possession of what God has made possible to us as his children. The dry code of morals, however sublime its maxims and supreme its sanctions, does not speak to the heart and does not open the deepest wells of the spirit.

The great electric generator in the power house is started by steam. Then it is swung into the mechanical system of which it is a part, and immediately it begins to run by a new power. The steam becomes then no longer necessary, for the engine has been brought into unison with the electric current which comes from the vast storehouse of the earth, and with that new and throbbing life it proceeds now on its mighty way. Henceforth you cannot stop it without stopping all the vast enginery of which it is a part. However a man may begin in his course of right living, with whatever vision of what is before him, or impulse from what lies within and about him, it is only when he has some one to love that he really becomes aware of the power he possesses. Then he works. Then he sacrifices. Then he is filled with the joy which both satisfies and ennobles.

That young man who was so indifferent to his work, so listless and even reckless in his life, is now intent, industrious, prudent, eager

to save and to possess, eager to become what he should be. Why? Simply because he is in love. His affection has gone out to some other, and that other's response has awakened this new life in his very soul. "Cut a little deeper," said the French soldier under the surgeon's knife, "and you will find the image of the Emperor." That was the explanation of the triumph of the French army, and of the military glory which so intoxicated the French people. Where is the key to the mystical courage of Charles George Gordon at Khartoum, or James Chalmers offering himself a sacrifice to the cannibals of New Guinea, if it is not in the vision that never left their thoughts of the Christ whom they loved and whom they served, present with them, speaking to them, waiting for them even in the moment of the last surrender?

The disciples of Jesus understood this. Open the book of the Acts. Are they there preaching morality? Everywhere "they preach Jesus, and him crucified." "The God of our fathers hath glorified his servant Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and denied. Yea, the faith which is through him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all." "I preach not myself, but Christ crucified." "For the love of Christ constraineth us." This was

their message everywhere and always. Their gospel went to the hearts of men and changed their lives. It reached from the palace of the king to the slave in his hut. Everywhere it made the crucified Christ a living presence. It brought to men a new life and a new hope because it gave them a new friend who was at once their Saviour and their God. Their glad testimony became quickly the response to the message that was brought to them; and the first witnesses of Christ could turn to their hearers with perfect confidence of the reality both of their experience and of their confession when they said to them as Peter did, "Whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." This was the first gospel delivered to the saints. It remains the only gospel of the Christian Church to-day. In offering it the Church pleads with men to accept it as it stands, that in it they may live. Christ is the one foundation; and there is no other. However a man may be led into the way of life, once in it, and learning of Jesus Christ, his heart at once answers to him; Jesus becomes the test of the reality of his new life and the pledge of its permanence.

X

THE SEARCHING QUESTION

“He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am?”—
MATTHEW 16. 15.

THE turning point had come in our Lord's ministry. The miraculous feeding of the multitude on the shore of Galilee had been followed by his refusal to allow the people to proclaim him king. When they realized this, and that his answer was final, the crowd that had followed him, and had been rapidly growing in numbers and in enthusiasm, began at once to dissolve. He saw what it meant and recognized that the failure of his mission so far as the people were concerned was inevitable. He had then withdrawn from Galilee to the neighborhood of Tyre to seek retirement, and, after a while, was returning to the northern borders of Galilee to prepare for the final journey to the Passover at Jerusalem. He had now reached a spot on the southern slope of Mount Hermon, in the neighborhood of Cæsarea Philippi. About a grotto which had been taken advantage of by early Greek settlers to erect an altar to their sylvan god Pan a com-

munity had gathered which had grown into a town; and lately Philip, the best son of Herod the Great, had built a city and given it the name of the emperor Tiberius Cæsar in connection with his own.

Here, standing on the confines of the great world of heathenism, then lying in its darkness and despair, but to whom his gospel was to be preached as a message of the love of that Father in heaven who is not willing that the least of his children should perish, of whom, as yet, they knew nothing, with behind him the chosen people, who, though heirs of the promises, and having the law and the prophets, were still so far from apprehending their privileges, or knowing the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that they were about to crucify his Son, Jesus turns to his disciples with the searching question of the text.

He introduced it by asking what the people thought of him. He knew, but he had a deep purpose. Their answer would be that they thought him anyone except the true Messiah. Their hope was dead. They did not know it, but, in fact, they had fallen away from the desire for spiritual leadership. They wanted only a conventional and convenient Christ. When he has their answer he turns to his disciples, asking, "But what do you think?" His

question was intended to separate them from the people about them and to lift them, if possible, at once to a higher faith and a final decision. He presses the same questions to-day, and we hear the same answers.

There is the answer of the favored classes. They say, "One of the prophets." It is enough to be Israelites. There have been many prophets. They are well known to us. We are of their kind, and this new one may be trusted to recognize us, if there be need, as we recognize him. Just as to-day the elect say, "It is enough to be gentlemen and ladies, cultivated people. We are not of the common herd. We belong to the privileged class who have had much knowledge of God in the past and who have taken advantage of their opportunities and privileges." They are not to be classed with the drunkard or the profligate or the heathen. Their attitude is that of the French nobleman of the old day, who dying was asked whether he did not want the priest, and replied, "No; the good God knows a gentleman when he sees him." That was sufficient; wrapped in the mantle of that supreme self-satisfaction he passed away. Many to-day are living in the same atmosphere and are, more or less consciously, making the same answer to Jesus Christ. They have no conscious need. On the

contrary, if there is any need, it is the world's need, and possibly God's need, of them, which in their own way and without undue burden they will recognize as they see fit. They patronize religion so far as they concern themselves at all with it.

Then, again, there is the answer of the Pharisee—the man who lives a scrupulous life, and is not “as this publican.” He said of old, Jesus was another John the Baptist. He, therefore, was but slightly concerned, as John's message had never been for him. He is himself a worker along the same lines. To-day he believes in civic service. He devotes himself to helping the community by various reforms. He believes in purified politics and settlements and clubs and general philanthropy. He denounces the churches because of their apparent indifference to these things. He thinks they spend too much money on foreign missions, and too little at home. He compares his well-ordered life with that of some whom he knows who are officers of churches. He feels that the betterment of the world is to come through the agencies in which he is chiefly interested, and frequently asserts that there are many better men outside of the church than there are in it. He approves of Jesus Christ so far as he finds in the Sermon

on the Mount a justification for his own attitude, and meantime has many a word of disparagement for the churches which bear Christ's name.

Then there are those whose answer is, "Elijah." These are the scribes. They are devoted to the ceremonies of religion. They keep the commandments. They magnify the ritual; they tithe the mint, the anise, and the cummin; they are faithful to the church. It is enough for them to make themselves acceptable to God by what they do in his service and for his cause. "Why do you talk to me as if I were not a Christian?" one of this class said to me. "You are not a member of the church." "No, but I am there every Sunday morning, rain or shine; and I often notice that when the weather is bad your deacons are not." To these men Christ is an institutor of certain ceremonies by which men can make themselves acceptable to God. It is an exalted form of penance, and readily passes current in the scheme of indulgences. We make God our debtor by the extent of our devotions, and we have no fear of the result, for God is just, and will recognize the debt.

Turning from these, Jesus presses a personal but a theological question: "Who do you say that I am?"

Some would separate religion from theology. They make religion a matter of chief importance, while theology is of small consequence. But if religion is, as some say, the binding of a man's thoughts to God, we must inquire what God is, in order that we may know upon whom our thoughts shall be fixed. If religion, on the other hand, is a system of service, we must ask what is the sanction for this service, and by what authority it is governed; to whom does it belong? Or if, again, it is said religion is a matter of the feelings and of the heart, we must ask to whom are those feelings to be directed, and upon whom is the affection of the heart to be set. Religion cannot exist apart from its object, which is God. So that when Jesus presses the question, "Who do ye say that I am?" he is asking not only for the affection of the heart, but for the clear apprehension by the head, for that completeness of devotion and personal surrender to him which alone can be accepted as marking a true discipleship.

As he led up to this question and turned with his searching gaze to his disciples, the pathos of the scene is impressive. Some thirty-two years had been spent under the restrictions and burdens of his earthly life. He was within a half year of his death. Indeed,

he now began to speak of his death which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem, where he has to "suffer many things of the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed." He had from the beginning claimed his Messiahship and his oneness with his Father. The life in himself which is the characteristic of divinity was his. He had power on earth to forgive sins. He had fed the multitude and healed all who were brought to him, as witness of his power to bless in this life no less than in the other. And the multitude had turned from him because he would not be made a king. He had gone to the coast of Tyre under the weight of the sorrow in his heart over Israel, and to come in touch with the heathen, who were waiting for his gospel. The poor Syrophœnician woman, pleading for her sick child and in her eager faith willing to accept even "the crumbs that fall from the children's table," was the picture of the new field opening for his gospel in the world outside.

He now turns with the new light in his heart, the "joy" in which he was to endure the cross, as he sets his face once more to the familiar scenes of his active ministry. Here, as he stands on the slope of that splendid mountain, which is the glory on the horizon of northern Palestine, and which furnished

to all the generations of Israel the noblest imagery of their praises, the words on the lips of the little company of his disciples but expressed the completeness of the separation of his people from him. There was no place for him in their hearts, as there was no understanding of him in their intelligence. They would gladly offer to him so much of recognition and respect as would place him with their great prophets; but there was not the least trace of recognition of what he was in himself. And the day is far spent. The shadow of the cross on which he is to give his life for the world already stretches out toward him. The night is at hand. How can he be content with such acceptance? He must press upon these followers about him the earnest question, "Where do you stand?" Have you not a surer faith? Does not your love spring from a deeper well? Is there not a recognition in your hearts of what I am doing for you, of what I am in myself? You have been close to me. You have been favored with privileges that the multitude have not. You have heard my words. You have had the benefit of my intimate teaching. I have done for you what it was not permitted to me to do for others. Tell me where you stand. Will you not go further than the thoughtless crowd? Have

you not in your hearts a deeper, surer truth than they?

He presses that question upon the favored men and women of to-day. You are the children of privilege. You know what it is to be a Christian. You have been brought up in Christian homes. You live in a Christian community and have all the advantages of an inherited Christian training. And you say, "There are many good men outside the church," and, "What need is there why I should make a public confession? There are so many things I am undecided about; so much in the Creed that I do not believe. I do not want to bind myself."

And this is all you have to say to the sorrowing Christ. We look into his face. We hear again his pathetic voice pressing the old command, "Follow thou me!" "Take my yoke upon you!" "Confess me before men!" Answer me clearly: "Who do you say that I am? Are you ashamed of me?" And when the answer comes, as it did of old, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," we see again the bright smile and hear again the solemn answer, "Flesh and blood have not revealed it unto you." This is not the wisdom of a man's own intelligence. It is not the result of labored argument, or of eager resolu-

tion. This is the work of the Spirit of God. It is the direct testimony of God to the soul, enlightening it in its darkness, melting it in its hardness, driving away the mists which long have beclouded it, showing a man to himself in the sin of his unbelief, in the weakness of his procrastination, delivering him, in short, from himself, by that grace of God which seeks the lost sheep and calls the prodigal back to his father's house. Yours is to be the joy of the forgiven sinner; yours the strength to do right; yours the new and ever-growing love of the Father, made known to you by his Son.

What is the religion that Jesus calls you to, as he asks this confession? It is a religion represented by his cross. Its head is lifted toward God. Its arms are outstretched toward men; its foot is rooted in the solid earth, and extended upon it is one who has given up himself in absolute devotion to God and to his service. Christ has spoken to you, and in the depths of your heart you have heard his voice, you have answered his call, and you have entered into life. What matters it what particular life it may be to which in his service you are to be led? Is it not enough that it is with him, and that you are entering his kingdom, where there is to be joy for evermore?

XI

THE MEANING OF A NEGLECTED CHRIST

“And we esteemed him not.”—ISAIAH 53. 3.

IN this sentence the sorrows of the servant of God, depicted in this incomparable chapter of the prophet, culminate. It seems to gather up in itself all that has been described of his being “despised and rejected,” “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”; and then to add this final affront, at once unnecessary, gratuitous, unspeakable.

Whomever the prophet had in mind, the Christian Church has with one consent recognized the description of the Lord, and has been moved with an emotion that has lost none of its strength through the centuries. It is “we” who have done it; and that “we” has been the self-accusing confession of generation after generation. To-day it is ours. It is not a charge that can be shifted from the speaker to be used as an arrow of God in other hearts. As we repeat it we find ourselves in the position of the great prophet who spoke for himself as well as for his people. You and I alike have no privilege of passing it on to some other

one while we stand aside. It is written of us as truly as it is written of any. The solemn responsibility that it declares becomes a solemn judgment upon every soul that does not find its last acquittal before the throne of God. Its consequences, whatever they may be, are not to be escaped; and the thought of the possible consequences, in the light of the later revelation of the New Testament, may well make any man pause.

We like to say, "Every man has a right to his own opinion"; and, "How I may esteem Jesus Christ I alone shall determine." Yes, we all have every right to our opinions; but we must all face the consequences. The gauge on the steam boiler is set at one hundred and fifty pounds. The engineer thinks the boiler can safely carry two hundred pounds. He raises the steam. The boiler explodes; and he has no second chance. The captain approaching the harbor says, "I can steer my vessel in as well as any pilot." He attempts to do so and runs her on the rocks. No one will listen to his excuses. The funeral cortége, conveying the remains of President Lincoln to their last resting place, was passing through the streets of Springfield, Illinois. A man on the sidewalk refused to take off his hat and uttered some disparaging remarks concerning the

martyred President. He barely escaped with his life at the hands of the indignant crowd. Jesus Christ goes to his death, and "we esteem him not." Is it not a matter of consequence?

But some one says, "The world does esteem Jesus Christ, and never more than to-day." Ask yourself, Is it true? Do I esteem him? A distinguished writer was recently in America. She was eagerly entertained and cordially welcomed. Suppose that on her way back to England she remembered that she had been welcomed as the granddaughter of Arnold of Rugby, that she was recognized as a cultured and refined lady, but that not a word was said about her books, even though there were those among them in the writing of which she had braved the public opinion of her own land and staked her heart, would she have felt that she had been esteemed? A world-famous German medical professor was lately with us. He had risked his life in India studying the bubonic plague, hoping to discover its bacillus and to find the antitoxin. If, when Professor Koch was returning to Berlin from America, he reflected that he had been received hospitably, and treated as a distinguished gentleman, but no mention had been made of the plague or antitoxin, would he have thought

himself rightly esteemed? A member of the Russian Duma was in America at the time of its first session when the question was agitating Russia whether the people would be allowed to send their representatives to Saint Petersburg. Suppose that after all the attention that was shown him, and the hospitality he received, he was allowed to return home without having had a word said to him about Russia and the great crisis for which he stood, would he have felt himself esteemed? The story is told of the late Mr. Whistler, the distinguished Anglo-American painter, that some one was talking to him of Sir Frederick Leighton, at that time the foremost English painter. The friend spoke of his personal charms, his culture, the beauty of his home, and his many attractive traits. When he paused Whistler with upturned nose and familiar sneer said, "He paints, I believe!"

So some men speak of Jesus Christ—a wonderful teacher, a great social reformer, a beautiful character, and so on, and so on; for the tale of his excellencies is never quite ended; and then we hear it added, "He died for the world, I believe." Do we, then, say that he was esteemed? What does it all come to if you and I accept the blessings of Christian civilization, and recognize the supreme influ-

ence of the Bible, and join in the praises of Him who is the object of so much of the New Testament story, and we do not care to know, or do not value, that for which he came into the world? The text, then, has an application for us and for the men of to-day.

Jesus Christ came for two things. First of all, he came to make God known. This was the burden of his utterance from the beginning to the end. God is love, and because He "so loved the world" he gave his Son to die for the world. Men knew nothing of God in that relation. Look where you will in heathenism, will you find anywhere such teaching as in this fifty-third chapter of Isaiah? Where is there a revelation like that which is given in Jesus Christ himself? Here is the love that will not let us go. It seeks that which is lost, and it saves, as only the Son of God can save. It gathers little children in its arms, and it reaches to the outermost man. And it presents this love as the expression of the character of a God who is holy and just.

Did you ever think what an awful thing it would be if God were not just? There are certain great facts which are to us fundamental. Our life moves within them as in a fixed orbit and we cannot go outside of them without distress and even disaster. For ex-

ample, we always assume that the earth is stable. Imagine what would happen if for a moment we were in doubt about it, if the earth beneath our feet should begin to give away, or even should tremble and rock. The universal testimony is, there is no terror like that which an earthquake occasions. Suppose a wife is compelled to doubt that her husband is loyal. At once everything is changed. What matters how fine her house is, or how abundant his provision for her needs? The foundation of all has gone. Imagine what the condition would be if we could doubt that God is just! No proclamation of divine love would have any validity. The foundation for faith in God and for every conceivable relation in which man can stand to his Maker, or in which there shall be room for adoration in the human soul, rests on the conviction that God's ways are always right. Paul has this in mind when in his exposition of the justifying work of Jesus he says, "It was for the showing of God's righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus."

Here lies the supreme work of the Lord. He came to justify the ways of God to men. The wonder of the revelation that he made lies in this, that that holy God, before whom every

sinner must tremble, is the same who yet loves the sinner and seeks, even in a way that lies beyond the understanding of man, by a divinely suggested atonement to deliver him from the consequences of his sin and to establish him in the divine grace. When this is grasped, then there is for the penitent heart peace in the assurance of pardon, comfort in the face of sorrow, strength as against every temptation, and, once and for all, meaning given to life; for we are to know him as only those know him to whom through Jesus Christ he is revealed.

When the late Dr. Martineau was resigning his pastorate in Liverpool he gave this as a farewell utterance: "The one deep faith which has determined my whole word and work among you is in the living union of God with our humanity. We pine as prisoners until we burst into the air of that supernatural life which he lives eternally; we are parched with a holy thirst till we find contact with the running waters of his quick affection. Him immediately, him in person; him in whisper of the day, and eye to eye by night; him for a close refuge in temptation, not as a large thought of ours, but as an Almightyness in himself; him ready with his moistening dews for the dry heart, his breathings of hope for the

sorrowing; him always and everywhere living for our holy trust, do we absolutely need for our repose, and wildly wander till we find. In Christ alone is the reconciliation perfect between the human and the divine.”¹

A year before he said of Jesus Christ: “He opens to us the moral and spiritual mysteries of our existence, appealing to a consciousness in us that was asleep before. And though he leaves whole worlds of thought approachable only by silent wonder, yet his own walk of heavenly communion, his words of peace and works of power, his strife of divine sorrow, his cross of self-sacrifice, his reappearance behind the veil of life eternal, fix on him such holy trust and love that where we are denied the assurance of knowledge we attain the repose of faith.”² This, then, is the supreme work of Jesus.

In the second place, Christ came to save us from sin. He died for you and me that we might live. This is the insistent and compelling message of the New Testament. It is reiterated in every form, and language is strained to present it to our apprehension. “Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, but with precious blood, even the blood of Christ.” “Unto him

¹Life, i, 333.

²Life, i, 286.

that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood." "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offers himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." "It was the good pleasure of the Father through him to reconcile all things unto himself." This is not a theory, but an experience; Christianity is not a philosophy, and not a quiet influence. It is a life born of God, his gift, the result in the sinful and penitent soul of accepting the redemption that is found in Jesus Christ. It brings joy and love and peace.

The other day the rescuing party after a long struggle reached the gallery in the mine where some English miners had been imprisoned for days. They were found all dead. By their side were written their last messages to the loved ones whom they were not to see again. They were messages full of love, and of joy in their faith in Jesus Christ. Both expressions were equally real, their love of their friends and their love of their Lord. This joy and peace, this strength in the presence of death itself, is what he came to bring; what he has brought to unnumbered souls and what he is bringing to-day and is able to bring to whoever will receive him. And the accusa-

tion stands, "We esteemed him not!" What if that accusation be true of you?

Years ago I knew a widow who had a younger son who was a constant anxiety. She made a home for him. She watched over him and cared for him while his spirit grew more and more rebellious through the years of his youth, until in early manhood his recklessness made him a daily distress. At last he left her home. Soon after she died. At the hour of her funeral I stood by her open coffin with a few friends in the little parlor of her humble cottage. As the service was about to begin steps were heard, and the son came in through the back door in the kitchen, and stood by the open coffin, looking into his mother's face. No one spoke. He gazed for a moment in silence, then turned and went out. He had esteemed her not! And now the meaning of that word and of his act was thrust upon him and upon all.

What will that day mean when you and I stand not by an open grave, but in the presence of Him who on the throne still will show the marks of the wounded hands and the pierced side, who died that we might live? "And we esteemed him not!" may well be the cry that will ring in the heart forever.

XII

THE CALL OF THE WORLD

“Jesus answered them, My Father worketh even until now, and I work.”—JOHN 5. 17.

A LITTLE while ago some one wrote this story, which is the best introduction of our theme:

“When the Nineteenth Century died, its Spirit descended to the vaulted chamber of the Past, where the Spirits of the dead Centuries sit on granite thrones together. When the newcomer entered, all turned toward him and the Spirit of the Eighteenth Century spoke: ‘Tell thy tale, brother. Give us word of the human kind we left to thee.’

“‘I am the Spirit of the Wonderful Century. I gave man the mastery over nature. Discoveries and inventions, which lighted the black space of the past like lonely stars, have clustered in a Milky Way of radiance under my rule. One man does by the touch of his hand what the toil of a thousand slaves never did. Knowledge has unlocked the mines of wealth, and the wealth of to-day creates the vaster wealth of to-morrow. Man has escaped the slavery of Necessity and is free.

“‘I freed the thoughts of men. They face the facts and know. Their knowledge is common to all. The deeds of the East at eve are known in the West at morn. They send their whispers under the seas and across the clouds.

“‘I broke the chains of bigotry and despotism. I made men free and equal. Every man feels the worth of his manhood.

“‘I have touched the summit of history. I did for mankind what none of you did before. They are rich. They are wise. They are free.’

“The Spirits of the dead Centuries sat silent, with troubled eyes. At last the Spirit of the First Century spoke for all:

“‘We all spoke proudly when we came here in the flush of our deeds, and thou more proudly than we all. But as we sit and think of what was before us, and what has come after us, shame and guilt bear down our pride. Your words sound as if the redemption of man had come at last. Has it come?

“‘You have made men rich? Tell us, is none in pain with hunger to-day and none in fear of hunger for to-morrow? Do all children grow up fair of limb and trained for thought and action? Do none die before their time? Has the mastery of nature made men free to enjoy their lives and loves, and to live the higher life of the mind?

“‘You have made men wise. Are they wise or cunning? Have they learned to restrain their bodily passions? Have they learned to deal with their fellows in justice and love?

“‘You have set them free. Are there none, then, who toil for others against their will? Are all men free to do the work they love best?

“‘You have made men one. Are there no barriers of class to keep man and maid apart? Does none rejoice in the cause that makes the many moan? Do men no longer spill the blood of men for their ambition and the sweat of men for their greed?’

“As the Spirit of the Nineteenth Century listened, his head sank to his breast.

“‘Your shame is already upon me. My great cities are as yours were. My millions live from hand to mouth. Those who toil longest have least. My thousands sink exhausted before their days are half spent. My human wreckage multiplies. Class faces class in sullen distrust. Their freedom and knowledge has only made men keener to suffer. Give me a seat among you, and let me think why it has been so.’

“The others turned to the Spirit of the First Century. ‘Your promised redemption is long in coming.’

“‘But it will come,’ he replied.”

It has come. To-day this text has an interpretation which it has not had in the past. Our Lord declared in this solemn and formal way that he had come to do only what God had always been doing. God had always loved the world. God had always sought to be known by his creatures. God had always sought to save sinners. Now he is making a new and final effort to do what had not been successfully done before.

Here is the explanation of the past. At the beginning God gave men religion. Always and everywhere they have possessed it. It is the expression of that divine image in which God made man and of that spirit which at the beginning God breathed into him. Man is a child of God. His Father has never forsaken him, and he has never been without that yearning which has moved him to express himself in some form of worship, and to be aware of that voice in his heart which we call conscience, but which instinctively men recognize as the voice of God. Men have overlaid such revelation of God as they have had and smothered it with their passions and appetites and wrongdoing. They have heaped upon such worship as God inspired in them their own misleading and often corrupting ceremonies, until the religions of the world have come to

be known chiefly as heathen, and as at once a mark and a cause of man's degradation.

Its counterpart is to be seen in the vast array of traditional rituals and ceremonies and historic doctrines which, whatever purpose they may have served in the past—and many of them have rendered great service—to-day are the load which a pure Christianity is carrying and which serve to divide the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ into so many distinctive groups or denominations which have kept Christians apart, have weakened its attack upon evil, and constitute the chief difficulty in the way of presenting the gospel of Christ to the outside world.

Therefore it was that when the method of the past failed, and the world like an overloaded ship was sinking with the weight of its corruptions, God sent his Son. In this sense it was that Jesus came to fulfill, and not to destroy. His message was not, God *will* so love the world, or even, God *does* so love the world, but God *has* so loved the world. It is the great historic truth that he proclaims. True in the present because it always has been true in the past.

This is the new vision of God in relation to the world which is given to us to-day. Men have attained only now to a new interpreta-

tion of the world religions. As never before men are eager to rid Christianity of all that divides and impairs. As never before they are feeling the yoke of its inherited divisions, and they now would strip off its forms and ceremonies and break away from its exclusive rituals. They will have none of its denominational or distinctive authorities. They are impatient of its divisive creeds; they are eager to reduce its denominational differences to a minimum, seeking only to cherish that which is a reminder of a moral and spiritual history, while they get rid of all that holds them back from recognizing the larger brotherhood. This movement which has begun by spontaneous movement, or, as may more justly be said, by the impulse of the Spirit of God, has already gained great headway on the more important mission fields. The churches of South India have already united in a common organization. Certain churches in Japan already are known as the Kumai churches, or the native Christian churches of that great country; looking forward to the day when all Christian churches there will be joined in one national organization. In North China three of the oldest Christian bodies have already combined their forces, and on one great mission field a native Christian recently said, "If the missionaries

were withdrawn we should at once unite our churches under one national name."

The reflex influence of this is widely felt at home. The question of Christian brotherhood has become vital and uppermost in all religious assemblies. At least, wherever it is broached it at once becomes dominant. Christianity is stripping herself for her great work as never in the past, and is reaching out the hand to her fellow men with a new eagerness and a new appeal as the Christian recognizes that the same Father in heaven who sent the message of his Son to him has been sending his message in other forms to his other children in all the ages; and that the religions in which their worship to-day is expressed, however degraded and antagonistic to that which the Christian believes, is nevertheless inspired by the revelation of the same God that the Christian worships. And his business is to help his brother to get rid of the ashes heaped upon the altar of his faith that the live coal from the altar of God hidden beneath may blaze anew.

This is the interpretation of the mission of Christ given to his Church to-day. He summons his followers to go with him into the great world and tell the world of his Father and theirs. The triumphant work which he

began, and which has been the glory of Christendom through the centuries, is the same work which God has been seeking to do from the beginning and which only now, by his sacrifice in giving himself for the world, is finally to be accomplished. This is the vision that makes the great appeal to the Christian Church to-day. It is the call of the twentieth century, and is the challenge and summons to the young life of the churches. Never have our young people had such an opportunity; and nobly they are responding to it. The Student Volunteer Movement, which the other day gathered four thousand young people in their great convention, is gaining volume like the rising tide, and is making possible a development of Christian missions and a progress of the Christian Church such as has never been seen in the past.

Over against it is the call of the world in secular directions. Business and science and art are each holding out their hands offering great prizes to the young people. Wealth and luxury and pleasure and power were never so accessible and never so attractive. But the call of the world as the cry of children of a common father is far more eloquent and should be far more impressive. It is a new voice as none of the others is. More startling

than the progress of the world in any other direction is this advance in Christian understanding of God's work in the past and of God's voice to-day. The shame and the loss, if it be not heeded, will be overwhelming.

Another parable by the same hand that wrote the one above sets this before us:

"The Spirit of Modern Progress one day called up a human being, and said to him: 'I perceive that you are discontented with your life. You long for things beyond your power. Tell me, now, what it is that will make you happy, and I will give it to you.'

"The human being stopped a moment to reflect before he replied: 'If you have such wonderful power at your command, then make my life more comfortable, for I am weary of it.'

" 'You ask what is easy,' replied the Spirit; and thereupon he gave the human being beautiful cities, with streets that were sometimes clean, and police departments that were occasionally efficient. He gave him handsome houses with modern plumbing and electric lights, and a thousand other things that made life comfortable.

" 'Now,' said the Spirit, 'do you wish for anything more? for you have but to ask and I will give it to you.'

" 'I should wish,' replied the human being,

'that my business life was less exacting and more comfortable.'

"'That, too, is easy,' answered the Spirit; and thereupon he gave the human being telephones and telegraphs, railroads and steamships.

"And after this the human being asked that his pleasures be made more comfortable, and thereupon the Spirit gave him fireproof theaters and comic operas, motor cars and yachts.

"Then again the Spirit asked, 'Do you still desire more?' and the human being replied, 'Yes; make my religion more comfortable.'

"'That is simplicity itself,' replied the Spirit; and thereupon he gave the human being magnificent churches, good preachers, and twenty-minute sermons.

"'And now,' asked the Spirit, 'are you satisfied at last? Or is there something yet lacking to your happiness?'

"'Yes,' answered the human being; 'my conscience troubles me. Make that comfortable.'

"'That is the easiest thing of all,' said the Spirit; and thereupon he did away with the personal devil and gave the human being an easy-going summer and a hell that made a comfortable winter resort.

“At that the human being fell back into his easy-chair and remarked, “Really, my dear Spirit, you have made religion so comfortable that I shall hardly need think of it,’ and he buried himself in the Sunday newspaper.

“As for the Spirit, he began to float out of the window.

“‘Where are you going?’ asked the human being.

“‘To see my father,’ said the Spirit. ‘He is dying.’

“‘And who is your father?’

“‘The Spirit of Nobility,’ replied the Spirit of Modern Progress. ‘He is on his last legs.’”

The Church is challenged to march with the army of modern civilization which is sweeping over the Oriental world. That civilization is destroying the civilization of the past, and the Church is challenged out of its destruction to gather the best possessions of its life that the world may be the gainer. “It is a dangerous work,” said Lord Cromer, on his return from Egypt, “politically, socially, and morally to trifle with the religious beliefs of a whole nation. European civilization destroys religion in the Orient without substituting another in its place. It remains to be seen whether the code of Christian morality on which European civilization is based can be

disassociated from the teachings of the Christian religion." The Christian Church does not believe that it can, and, furthermore, it believes that because God has been working in all the life of the Orient, and the people of the Orient are God's people to-day, the gospel of Christ, which has created its own life, is as truly meant to take up and finish God's work in the Orient as it was to do his work in the Occident. It hears his voice in the command of Jesus that it is to go and disciple all nations; and its summons to its own young people is to give themselves to that task with an eagerness of hope and an earnestness of consecration which is worthy of the new century, and will be the answer of their hearts to the summons of Christ to advance with him to his final triumph.

XIII

THE WINNING OF THE BEST

"O Lord Jehovah, thou hast begun to show thy servant thy greatness, and thy strong hand: . . . Let me go over, I pray thee, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan."—DEUTERONOMY 3. 24, 25.

THIS is the pathetic cry of a successful but brokenhearted man. His life work was accomplished. He had successfully led the children of Israel through the forty years of wandering, and now stood with them on the border of the promised land, only to be told by God that he was not to enter with them. It was the long-deferred but inevitable penalty for his past shortcoming and all but forgotten earlier sin.

His prayer is to be in vain; but it shows the greatness of the man, and marks the contrast between him and the people about him. They have been content with the life of the wilderness. He alone has had the vision of the land beyond. It was the goal of his hopes. It had fixed the strong purpose with which he had led them through all the years of their wanderings. And now when he stands on the brink

of Jordan he is not to be permitted to cross, eager as is his prayer.

Some such vision is in the plan of God given to all of us. It is intended to be the inspiration and the call to the best things of life, as it has been the inspiration and call to all who have done things in the service of God in the past. We feel the futility and emptiness of any historic celebration in the life of a nation, as of great days in the life of the individual, if they do not create for those concerned in them ideals and set before them goals of attainment which shall be an abiding inspiration. They are, however, merely landmarks of the path in which our daily life lies. They serve to summon us to inquire how far that life is guided by the inspiration of the vision of the future; how far we are looking beyond the things that are seen, despite the abundant prosperity of the years through which we are passing and the wide prevalence of conditions of material comfort.

There is always more or less unrest in many hearts—unrest over ourselves and those we love, as to the value and purpose of our lives and the worthiness of the ends to which our hearts are directed. But when we come to examine ourselves we find that but few are praying Moses's prayer. Whatever may lie

beyond, as a matter of fact we are more concerned with the present than we are with anything that the future may have in store. God has given us "exceeding great and precious promises." We know there is a spiritual Canaan to be attained. But when we read Moses' story and stand in thought by his side, how little of his thought takes possession of us; and, whether we have been successful or not in the things to which we have set our hands, how little we feel of the passionate outburst of his heart, as he proclaimed his feeling of the utter emptiness of all that he had, and all that he had done, if at last he were not to gain the great blessing which God had once set before him as the goal of all his hope! How little we know of the passion of the cry with which he appealed to all that God had done for him in the past, the showing of his greatness and his strong hand in his behalf, only to sweep it all aside as he pleaded for what now he was not to see, the good land that is beyond the Jordan!

As we pause to ask why it is that we are so easily contented, we are reminded that the method by which we have attained so much of religion as we have has been an easy one. Possessions are generally valued according to what they have cost. What is lightly won is

lightly held. We live in a time when Christianity is the accepted faith. Most of us were brought up in Christian homes, or at least have always lived in a Christian community. Such religion as we have has come to us, as Dogberry says in the play, as reading and writing do, "by nature." We take it as a matter of course. We have not had to struggle and fight for it as many have done, and we know little of the meaning of sacrifice either to get or to maintain it.

The result is that we do not value those particular things for which religion stands, and which it holds out to us as its best gifts, as we would have valued them under other conditions; and the effect of this easy possession is morally weakening, according to the law of the physical life and of nature. There we find what we know as the law of survival. There attainment, and growth, even existence, depends upon struggle. When that necessity ceases degeneracy follows, and then decay and death. New teachings of theology or of ethics, so far as they make attainment of religion and of morals easy, play havoc with character. In comparison with the material things which life offers as rewards for strenuous efforts, success in business, wealth, luxury, power, such attainment has but a slight hold on us.

These things we have contended for in the arena or the market, where the crowd contests every prize and challenges every ambition. Each has cost us all that we had to put into it of devotion and courage, our every thought and unhesitating self-denial. When it is won, of course, we value it. We seize it with both hands. We suffer it to fill for us the entire horizon. What wonder that under such conditions the unattained in religion is the unreal, and the visions of any land of promise are but the shadowy substance of a dream!

Furthermore, the common characteristic of the Christian life to-day is contentment with so much of religion as we have. The ready response to the appeal to strive for the higher and better things, the things of the Spirit, is: "O, we are not saints. We are just average Christians. Those things are all very well, and doubtless mean much to some people, but they are not for us." We forget that "saint" is the New Testament term for all Christians. By so much as they regard themselves as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and bear his name, in the New Testament they are addressed as saints, no less than brethren, and beloved. We have no right, then, to limit that word to mark the spiritual gifts of the few, or the possibilities of spiritual life set here and

there before some exceptional child of God. To speak of "average Christians" means to lower the standards of our own possible attainment, as in the trade unions, when an average is fixed which depreciates and minimizes possibilities of efficiency, and is to rob the Christian of ambition and to deprive the religious life of its sweetest joys.

That this is a widespread and prevalent condition may be readily shown. For example, consider how easily we content ourselves with our religious knowledge. Great questions are in the air to-day. They concern God, and the Bible, and heaven, and hell, and revelation, and immortality itself; and they are thoroughgoing, attacking the very foundations and questioning the actual existence of the great revelations upon which religion and the hopes of the soul depend. But how little interest they awaken compared with other questions, social, economic, political. In these, even in their most transient and superficial forms, it is very easy at any time and almost anywhere to awaken interest, to gather an audience, to monopolize conversation, or to arouse heated discussion.

Think of the questions concerning which the talk of the day is most abundant, suffrage and taxation and party politics and social ambi-

tions. It would be easy to extend the list indefinitely. But in the great things of religion and of the deeper life of man, how much is waiting to be known, and how much depends on the views that men take of these things! The centuries have been shaped by the doctrines that men have held concerning them in the past. No influence is comparable to them in molding the lives of the multitude of individual men and women.

Think of the power exercised in the past by such doctrines as that of the inspiration and verbal authority of the Bible, or of the sovereignty of God, or of predestination and election, of original sin and total depravity, of the authority of the Church, or of great systems, like Calvinism. Harnack has lately said that the Western world, Catholics and Protestants alike, are thinking the thoughts of Augustine, the great formulator of the earlier Christian doctrines, and speaking his words to-day. Then turn to the newer doctrines, the higher criticism, the immanence of God, evolution, a monistic philosophy, and all views that have been held in regard to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Where will you match them with any influence in the life of men comparable for power? And yet the great mass of Christian men are content, not simply not to know what

is true and what is false concerning these great teachings, but not to care and not to inquire.

Consider also how content we are with such spiritual attainment as we may happen to possess. We are Christians. Yes. We hold the faith of Jesus Christ and rejoice in the assurance of forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven; and, holding this, we go about our business with little further concern. We say, "Many things were for me settled long ago, and I do not bother myself further about them." But compare Paul's attitude. "The excellency," that is, the fullness, "of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord," is something in comparison with which he says, "I count all things but dross." That is, he will give up everything if only he may attain to it. For he says: "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Imagine Paul set alongside of Moses and told as Moses was that he was

not permitted to go forward! Is it imaginable that he would have uttered any other cry than that which burst from Moses's heart? Compare with it our indifference, and say if it ought not to be a revelation as to the real significance of the contentment concerning our spiritual attainments with which we jog on.

Consider also our general attitude toward Christian service. How constantly we find on our lips the answer, "I am too busy"! Every day brings us abundant excuse. Life is so full. Business is so pressing. We have so many engagements. We get so tired. Of course, we are not able to engage in much that is worthy to be called definite Christian service. We delight to think, and we think properly, that the Christian's daily life may be, and in many cases doubtless is, his true service. If God inhabits the praises of Israel, as the psalmist sings, surely he does not find the honest, faithful life of his children a matter of unconcern to himself, or in many respects alien to his thought.

We talk much of our unconscious influence, and doubtless it is of high value. We thank God for it. We may well pray that it may increase, and that we may be helped to live lives which will make the appeal to it both sincere and in some degree worthy of our profession.

"Example speaks louder than words." That is true. But the contrast is not between example and words. It is between that kind of service which costs us something and that which does not. That tribute to Christ to which with some justice we may apply "taking up our cross daily and following him": how little there is of it in an easy-going, luxurious Christian's life of to-day! And how much there is in the pressure under which we all are of the constant excuse of our being too busy with other things, or unprepared, or not having strength, because we have used the strength up on other things! When the old Puritan preacher, John Eliot, was on his deathbed, a friend called to see him and found a little Indian child by his bedside being taught by the dying man to read. The friend protested that in such an hour the sick man might be relieved from the burden of such a task, and his answer was, "God has left me just strength enough to teach this child his letters."

God is giving us as a nation many a new lesson. Not the least of these is that as a result of the Spanish War our self-centered national life has been broken up. We were largely a hermit, if not an unchristian, nation, so far as international affairs were concerned. We washed our hands of responsibility for the

rest of the world. The outer world was for us merely "a foil to the single blessedness of American conditions." "Yankee boasting" was a far too real expression of the self-sufficiency of our national life. To-day the old provincialism and disdain, the utter absorption in our material prosperity and superabundant strength, has been disturbed. We now find, whether we will or not, that we have to face new duties and new responsibilities. We must shape our policies, both internal and external, with regard to the world at large, and even to the interests of other nations, great and small. We may be sharply challenged at any time for our doings, and may be made to suffer commercially and in our good repute. We must now advance on the way that leads to the land of promise that lies beyond. We must cross a Jordan which divides the old condition from the new as really as the river divided the wilderness of the promised land for the children of Israel.

Compare this with our personal life. The call to us is to recognize similar conditions. Expanding business does not mean expanding men. Great wealth now so widely diffused, great business opportunities now within the reach of so many, the abundant life now opening to all in every realm of human occupation,

is not to be our excuse from doing the will of God, or to close our eyes to the vision of those spiritual attainments and Christian duties which God holds out as constituting the real land of promise, to win which life is really given to us. A growing man is God's greatest achievement. Up to this the long process of nature has led, a man made in the image of God, endowed with mind and heart and will, a man possessing an immortal soul, capable of thinking God's thoughts, of responding to God's love, of growing into the divine likeness, of playing a man's part in God's universe.

God needs our help to secure this result. The work is to be done, and done now in the life in which we are living and in such conditions as those which are about us; for God in his wisdom has placed us here with the possibilities to which he has shaped us. It was for us living this life that the Lord prayed, not that we might be taken out of the world, but that we might be kept from the evil, and that in this life, with our weaknesses and our temptations, we might still be sanctified, that is, upbuilt and perfected in the truth. The conditions of success and of possibility are varied and important, but, after all, these conditions, of which we make so much, are largely external, and externals have only a secondary

place in the work that God has for us to do. One says, "If I were rich!" but the rich man is generally self-sufficient, and that self-sufficiency is one of the most effective obstacles in the way of doing the will of God. Another says, "If I were not rich!" but the poor man finds himself so absorbed in the effort to provide for daily necessities that he has little heart or thought for anything else. Paul said, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content"; that is, I may be free, not to be content with myself, or that to which I have attained, or with that with which I am now so wholly engaged, but content to use life as it comes to me, to do the will of God. As Edward Bowen, of Harrow, used to put it, "to take sweet and bitter as sweet and bitter come, and to play the game!"

The most important truth to-day is not the great new truth of human brotherhood, greater and newer in the thought of men to-day than it ever was in the past, and not the power that lies in organization, a power to the realization of which the world has only at last come. Rather it is this, that the chief business of life, the really vital things in life, like the meeting of the sexes, the rearing of the young, and the forming of character, must be left to ordinary men to do for themselves, even if they

do them ill. In other words, that the real responsibility for what we do, or what we do not, is not to be determined by our circumstances, but is determined by our purpose.

We are "workers together with God," and the glory of the life that he has given to us is that he has intrusted us with this great responsibility of directing that life in all its deep essentials ourselves. Every appeal, therefore, that he makes to us to come up higher in our conception of truth, in our attainment of character, in the efficiency of our service, in our sure hold of his promises, in our actual possession of spiritual life—in short, in our faith and in our fellowship with himself—is addressed to that in us by virtue of which we are children of God. And when that appeal awakens in any human heart a response, and on any lip is heard a cry like that of Moses, that the Lord will not suffer us to drop behind, but will make it possible for us to press forward to the actual possession of the land of promise that lies beyond, then, and then only, is the purpose of God with his child attained.

XIV,

THE TEST OF THE JORDAN

"They said, If we have found favor in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession; bring us not over the Jordan."—NUMBERS 32. 5.

To catch the significance of this text we must set beside it Moses's pleading petition that he might be permitted to go over the Jordan, which the Lord had refused him. We have the picture of the man of God asking for that from which the people about him begged to be excused. He was a man with a vision. They are the men without.

Their request was perfectly natural. The narrator of the incident tells that the country about them was "a land for cattle." And as cattle-raising was their occupation, naturally they said, "Bring us not over Jordan. This land is good enough for us. Why should we not be content? Why should we give up the immediate tangible good for possible advantages, only to be obtained by hazardous adventure, and in the face of unknown difficulties?"

The question suggested by the text is not

simply of Reuben and Gad, the two tribes that pleaded it, but of us who to-day read the story. It changes its form, but it has its old significance. Why not exercise our own judgment and order our lives by common sense? Why not be content where we are and with such things as we have? Why disturb ourselves over what lies in the future or what is unattained? Doubtless there is a large realm of possible attainment in matters of religion that is opened to us in the Bible, matters of spiritual attainment and apprehension of the things of God and fellowship with him, of growth in Christian character, with endless possibilities of Christian service. Undoubtedly there is in these things what corresponds to "the goodly land beyond the Jordan," of the children of Israel. But the troublesome Jordan runs between, and there are many difficulties, seen and unseen. Why may we not be content as we are? This is a particularly good country that lies about us. It meets very satisfactorily our present needs. We have business and friends and some choice of pleasure, plenty to do that is worth doing, and plenty to enjoy. Why worry ourselves over the unattained? Saint Paul did, it is true, and made a hard time for himself. And the Church is continually exhorting us to be up and doing in other

directions; and from time to time the preacher makes us more or less uncomfortable because we do not do differently. As a matter of fact, we can get along very well as we are, having a quiet conscience, living a reasonable life, and withal becoming increased with goods. This land is "good for cattle." It supplies the things we need, and we have not begun to exhaust its resources. Why can we not, as the Lord's people, do his will, and, at the same time, make it very comfortable for ourselves by staying where we are?

Thus the parable of the text states more or less graphically the problem of Christians everywhere. It is by no means a hypothetical question, but one which all must recognize as obviously practical, and one that perhaps should be regarded as pressing. Let us seek the answer which the narrative suggests.

It is clear from the story that the children of Reuben and of Gad did not see that it was important to God that they went on. They were a part of the larger company of the children of Israel with whom God was undertaking a definite work. We believe that God has a plan for each life, but we fail to see that that plan is wrapped up in his plan for his kingdom. God was leading Israel for a purpose. The revelation of God to the world was in it.

Conditions were to be created in which it was to be possible for God to bring in his kingdom among men, and the command was, "Every armed man of you will pass over the Jordan before Jehovah, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him." If they stayed behind the plan would fail. As Moses says, "For if ye turn away from after him, he will yet again leave Israel in the wilderness; and ye will destroy all his people."

It is of consequence to God if you or I stay behind, or fall out on the way, or fail to do our part as he sets it before us in the progress of his kingdom. We reply that this seems to stake too much upon us. What possible difference can it make in the plan of God, or in the accomplishment of his great purposes in the world, if so insignificant an individual fails to go forward in Christian service, or in the attainment of spiritual growth? Among the countless millions, not simply of humanity, but of the great multitude who are eventually to make up the company of the redeemed, one more or less is certainly unimportant. And in the midst of the great achievements of God through their service in the redemption of the world the service of one who is but as the least of them cannot count for much. It may possibly be a matter of some importance to

myself, but it cannot signify in the kingdom of God.

But we can easily see how it works. Suppose Moses, when an exile and a herdsman in Midian, had not heeded the call of God, or later had not ventured to lead the Israelites out of Egypt; suppose Abraham had not gone up from Ur of the Chaldees; or the Pilgrim Fathers had been content not to leave their refuge in Holland; or David Livingstone had not plunged into the heart of Africa; or Hannington had not gone to his death at the hands of the Massai; or the first missionaries had not gone to Japan just at the time when the movement for the new Japan of to-day began: how different the history of the world would be! Because we are God's children; because he is in truth our heavenly Father, and not a mere Omnipotent Creator, we must believe that we are important to God, and that our doing or not doing has its part in the advance of his kingdom. This persuasion is essential to the conception of the love of God and to the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. By so much as we regard ourselves Christians, on the basis of what Christ has done in seeking and finding us and redeeming us unto himself, we must believe that it was done for a divine purpose, and that that purpose is an

integral part of the ultimate plan of God; so that when we come to discuss the question of personal Christian growth, or of our training for service, or of choosing our life career, from the smallest question to the largest that affects the character that we are to form, the kind of life that we are to live, or the particular service that we are to render, nothing is too insignificant to be considered in its relations to what God desires us to do, or what is really important in his sight and in his great purposes. So far from this being an absurd conception, it is what gives dignity to life, and alone serves as the sufficient interpretation of the true meaning of life, with its inexhaustible opportunities and continual call for choices, the future outcome of which we cannot see, but the immediate bearing of which upon Christian character and Christian service, and often of direct Christian testimony, we cannot fail to recognize.

It is also evident that these children of Reuben and of Gad did not see that service of our brethren may be a measure of service of God. Moses at once presses this upon them: "Shall your brethren go to the war, and shall ye sit here?" God would not accept their expressions of gratitude or their recognition of his providential care as a substitute. Moses

sweeps away their words to this purport as of no consequence in comparison with their prayer to be suffered to remain behind.

We give money to build houses of worship, or to establish or support notable philanthropies. There is something more to be done. There is a more compelling law than the instinct of worship or of philanthropy, namely, the law of love. Nature has suggestions of it even in the presence of a merciless force defined for us as the law of the survival of the fittest—that is, of what is best adapted to survive in the great struggle of existence. There is provision in nature itself for the survival of the best. Everywhere there is indication of what we recognize as social instinct, of mother love, of sex relationship, involving sacrifice and personal surrender in order to secure the life or the well-being of some other. Only so are the highest forms of nature obtained. In man this has become the compelling law, both of society and of religion. “He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”

God aims at the best. Only in obedience to this law does the best become possible in God’s universe. No simple survival of the selfish, or the self-sufficient, or the strongest, or the most cunning, or the best adapted to the environ-

ment, will answer the purpose of God. He will have only the worthiest, only that ultimately which approaches nearest to himself, which is best fitted to represent himself, his wisdom, his character, his love. No man can live to himself and hope to attain to this. The moment a man discovers that there is an ideal of life and character after which he has to strive, and everyone is capable of this, he discovers that he needs the help of his fellows in his effort to reach that ideal. Unless there is that mutual help, not only does he fail to attain the goal, but the community of which he is a part also drops to a lower level. It can only attain to what are lower forms of character. Therefore, the appeal of the sick, and of the poor, and of the social needs of the community as a whole, becomes essential to the progress both of the individual and of the community; and, therefore, God requires that this appeal be recognized, as he has so constituted society that the appeal shall be made. A man cannot go about his business content with what he possesses, or what he has to enjoy, while he is indifferent to the needs of his fellow men, and at the same time regard himself as a worthy servant of God. The taking up one's cross daily and following Jesus Christ, which is the condition of discipleship,

involves looking not upon one's own things, but upon the things of others, in order that the love of God, which has taken possession of us, may go forth from us to the blessing of others. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ," is the command of universal application.

Those men of Reuben and of Gad also failed to see that even the possession of the things upon which they had set their hearts turned on their service of their brethren. Moses said to the people, "If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you over the Jordan, every man that is armed to battle, before Jehovah, and the land shall be subdued before you; then ye shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession." We can easily understand why a Christian must recognize his duty to his brethren as the condition of his entering into the privileges which are properly his own. Such service brings the approval of God and peace in one's own heart, no less than it brings that love of others which is the sweetest recompense for an unselfish life. It is the surest path and the widest door to that appreciation and grateful memory which are the best reward of a generous life. In many places in England one comes upon statues of the late Lord Shaftesbury, the man

best known in his generation for his lifelong devotion to the interests of the poor and the suffering, the costermonger in the street and the women and children working in the mines of Great Britain. He exalted and beautified the conception of Christian character, as he made its possible attainment more real to the men of his generation and of the Christian world.

Furthermore, these men of Reuben and of Gad did not see that penalty would ensue if their prayer were granted. Moses's rebuke was, "But if ye will not do so"—that is, go forward with your brethren—"behold, ye have sinned against Jehovah; and be sure your sin will find you out." This is the judgment pronounced upon selfish indifference to others' needs. We hear it constantly argued against any doctrine of future punishment that it is inconceivable because of the character of God. God is love; therefore, it is claimed, logically it follows that that love will never rest while any creature of God falls short of happiness, or the attainment of all that ever was possible for him. It is well to remember that the world is not ordered by logic. There are other great forces and other methods of arriving at the truth. There is deeply planted within us the conviction that the moral law requires

punishment of the transgressor; that sin, which is and always must be "exceeding sinful" in any realm in which the moral law shall run, must be found out, or brought to light, and, being brought to light, must encounter penalty which shall stand in some adequate relation to the sin itself. God cannot be morally indifferent; and in no perfect moral character can love supersede the demands of justice and of righteousness. Men cannot run counter to the purposes of God, or be disobedient to his command, without, in his own determined time and measure, incurring consequences.

Here, then, is our Jordan. On the one hand are the things about us—the life that we are living, the condition to which we have attained. Beyond are the hard things, the land of promise, the work we have not yet done, the things we have not yet tried. They have not the same phase to all; each has his own place, as he has his own gifts and his own opportunities, and, therefore, his personal call of God. The great business of life is to find occupation for oneself, not simply in determining the career which we shall enter, or the particular work we shall do, but also in determining when we shall be content, and how, and when, and how long we shall strive for that which

is yet to be attained. Not to press onward is defeat.

The blessed rule is that "if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." But a willing mind will not be content until it finds its opportunity, and makes its effort, and does its best to reach the goal. It is sure to get its hand upon its task and does not easily let go. This is the call of God to every Christian. To come up higher, to make life more profitable, to have larger joy, a richer spiritual experience, a more satisfactory service, a closer fellowship with the Master, than have yet been realized—these are the true Christian goal and the sweetest Christian reward.

XV.

CHRIST'S CURE FOR "THE BLUES"

"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me."—MATTHEW 11. 4-6.

JOHN THE BAPTIST had been arrested by King Herod and was in prison. The martyr, or criminal, who finds himself in prison, takes a very different view of things from what he did before. Courage and bravado fall off there. John had staked all on Jesus. When he saw, in the crowd gathered about him, him on whom the Spirit of God descended, and knew him as the Messiah, he recognized the culmination of his own work. He said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." But how different a Messiah he had proved to be from what John had expected! And now that John found himself in prison it was not strange that doubts gathered thick and fast.

We all have similar experiences. We throw ourselves into some task. We ought to see

such and such results; or we ought to receive such recognition; or we ought to have the health and strength to complete our work; or we ought to have still about us the children, or the friends for whom we care or who are to assure our success; and, in fact, we have encountered very different experiences. Failure has come, or disappointment, or illness, or the death of those we love. Then we doubt everything. We are querulous toward God. We cannot pray. We will not attend church. Our Bible remains closed. We talk much at random. We are not sure that there is a God. We do not know what we have done to deserve such treatment. Religion is of small use.

Sometimes we are downcast and disappointed without knowing why, and the effect is much the same. The doctor says we are bilious, or dyspeptic, or have a liver. He tells us that fatigue is a poison, and we have had an overdose. Our world goes wrong in one way or another, as John's did; and we are "blue." It is a common experience. When the sorrow is great, friends come and sit by our side and talk to us, as Job's friends did, and we feel the same emptiness in their words. When the wise friend appears and says nothing, but just takes our hand, or remains by us, we are grateful; for we are glad

that he knows how little words count in such an hour. Even when, as with Job, God answers, we look in vain, as he did, for the significance of the answer. In that wonderful drama Job found his comfort, not in any divine explanation of his experiences, but in the simple fact that God was with him.

But now day has come; and when a good man is in trouble, as John was, it is interesting to know that he sends directly to Jesus; and the chief value of the record is in the answer which our Lord returns to him. For here we have Christ's method of dealing with people who are in sorrow, or are disappointed and downcast; a method which may be accepted as the God-given method for all time.

Jesus's message to John is, "Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me." He tells John in a word that all goes on just as it did before. John's condition alone has changed. God's plan is fixed and nothing has happened to interfere with it. "God's in his heaven: all's right with the world."

There is immense comfort to be found in the

mere steadiness of nature. At the beginning of the Bible story, after the flood, the promise was, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." We all know the meaning of this. The winter may be upon us, dark and cold and stormy, but underneath the frost the earth is stirring with new life. The days already are lengthening. The sun grows warm. The rivers will soon be loosened. The robin will soon be singing before our door. The spring is coming, all the richer in its promise, all the more joyous in its beauty, because the winter has preceded it. We have no thought that the springtime will fail. The night has been dark; but it will not be long before the day dawns and the night will be forgotten. Or we walk at midnight under the stars, and however great our burden, or oppressive our sorrow, the stars speak to us of comfort. They are shining undisturbed, or completing their majestic courses in the heavens. The morning stars that sang together at the beginning of creation have never changed their music or failed in their praises. Abraham walked beneath them on the hills of Palestine, and God talked with him "as a man talketh with his friend." And men have heard God's voice and

felt God's presence ever since, as they also have walked beneath the midnight stars.

John perhaps could only get a glimpse of them from his prison cell, but when the message came to him he knew that they were there, and realized that God had not changed, that his love was not withdrawn, that his child and faithful servant was not forgotten. His quick recall by Jesus to this great truth at once laid hold of him, and brought him to himself, and drove away his "blues," and ministered to him a new comfort and strength, as it brought back to him the truth in which he had always lived and for which, indeed, he was now suffering. This suffering itself became at once a glad tribute to the faith in which he had lived. It could not be otherwise, for the faith was real, and the foundations which had been laid in it were not likely to be disturbed.

The message of Jesus brought also to him the prophylactic of sympathy. It said, "Lift up your eyes and see how many others are in trouble. About you is the great world of the blind and the lame, the lepers, the deaf, and the poor. Even the dead are in many homes, and sorrow quite as great as yours burdens a multitude of hearts." And as John hears the message he recognizes that Jesus is speak-

ing to him out of his own experience; for he had come to bear our sicknesses and carry our sorrows, and he was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He was entering every day deeper and deeper into the mystery of pain, and encountering more and more heavily the weary weight of all this unintelligible world.

Instinctively John recognizes this as he recalls the very face of the Master and remembers the prophecies of the Servant of God, who was to be the suffering one, despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and at once his thoughts are lifted above himself and turned upon others, with a life-giving reaction of tenderness. It is singular that it should be so—that power of sympathy has to wait until suffering comes to us. It would seem that the joyous and the strong would be the ones who would sympathize most promptly with suffering or distress, and that if the weak are to be lifted up, those who have their own feet firmly planted are the ones who more effectively could minister to them. But the opposite is true. When one comes to us with words of comfort, and we can reply, "We know that you also have suffered," at once our hearts are open to his ministration, and the comfort he brings is a true prophylactic.

So we get help ourselves when in our suffer-

ing we can turn our thoughts or our hands to minister to others who are in some trouble. Our Lord's message helped John at once to forget himself, and when he did that new powers opened in his own soul, which not only changed his view of his situation, but filled him with the desire to be helpful to others.

The other day a business man died whose name is known in all the land for a most blessed and successful philanthropy. Years ago he lost a beautiful young daughter, his only child. His heart at once went out to the young girls lost in a far more distressing way in our great cities; and to-day "Florence Crittenton Homes" for the rescue of fallen girls, extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific, are the expression of the power of that sympathetic heart comforting and restoring itself in its blessed service of saving others.

Many years ago, when in my student days I was in Paris, there was there a famous oculist who was also a banker. Years before the sister with whom he lived was stricken with blindness which the doctors pronounced incurable. He was not married and had no one else to love, and could not bear the thought that this sister who was so much to him should be left without remedy. He therefore took up the study of medicine in the hours that he could spare from

his business, and with such success that he became one of the most famous oculists of his time. When I knew of him he was still giving his mornings to his business, while every afternoon he ministered to the poor blind people of Paris without price. One can readily imagine the wells of comfort that his distress had opened in his own heart, through the new power to heal sufferers, for all the remaining years of his life.

Dr. Horton, of London, says that Mr. Bryce on a certain occasion, seeing Mr. Gladstone in the House of Commons with countenance saddened by the troubles of Ireland, to divert his thoughts told him that some one had recently discovered that Dante had in his last years been appointed at Ravenna to a lectureship which raised him above the pinch of want. Mr. Gladstone's face lit up at once and he said, "How strange it is to think that these great souls whose words are a beacon light to all the generations that have come after them should have had cares and anxieties to vex them in their daily life, just like the rest of us mortals!" It was a condition of their power.

Jesus summons John to consider the needs of others, that the sympathy thus awakened and kept alive in his heart may heal his own

distress. But his message contains still more than this. It testified that the kingdom of Christ was coming, and God's work was going forward in the world. Here were the signs of it. They were the same that John had seen and that were foretold by the prophets. Did he not recall the ancient testimony that the Anointed One would come, proclaiming that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, as he preached good tidings unto the meek, and bound up the broken-hearted, and proclaimed liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound! Those signs were everywhere to be seen, though the Messiah appeared to him so different from what he expected. There were no armies with banners to drive out the oppressor and to restore to Israel her earthly kingdom. But the kingdom of God was come. God's power is adequate to the task. He is working in love. The sorrows of men are his opportunity. Trials and disappointments and loss do God's work in bringing the world to him. They give love a chance. They make hearts tender and joys sweeter. They enrich and ennoble human life. Above all, they detach men from lower things and inspire them to rise above themselves, and prepare them for the day of Christ's final coming. The gospel, that is, "good tidings of God," is

preached. Men are hearing. Hearts are opened to God, not in spite of sorrow, but even by means of sorrow; and God is glorified, and men are blessed.

As this message came to John and as, turning his eyes from himself, he recognized the work of Jesus in its deeper significance, he saw that it was the work of God, hastening his day, as that day had never been hastened in the past. How small his trials must have seemed in comparison! How completely the "blues" must have been driven out of his heart! The darkness of the cell in which he was confined must have been irradiated with the glory of the new day whose dawn he was permitted to behold.

That vision of the kingdom is the abiding one in the Christian world. The light never has failed altogether on the mountain tops, dark as at times have been the shadows in the valleys. Persecutions have come and gone. In many places and for long periods the cry of the martyr has been the only song of the Christian; but the light has never been put out, and we are living in a day when that light is rapidly dispelling all others, and nations that long have sat in heathen gloom are now emerging into the new life of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. If, then, sorrow falls upon the

individual believer, or the "blues" get possession of the individual Christian heart, the message which brought comfort to that earliest disciple should come with an altogether restoring power to the despondent soul to-day. God's work is going forward, and we have but to play our part, to hold fast our faith, in order to enter in with him into his triumph, no matter how great the sorrow or how bitter the disappointment or the trial.

But the message went further than this. It proclaimed blessings, too great for words, awaiting the man whose sorrows and disappointments do not separate him from Christ. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me." It is often a very hard thing to do, not to be arrested in one's work, not to find one's hand palsied, or one's feet rendered sluggish in the service of our Lord, when we ourselves are called to pass through deep waters, or are confronted by unexpected disappointment.

We were in full career. The heart was eager and the hands were full of work. We had no thought of self, no care for fatigue. Are we not doing what is worth while? Is it not for Christ and for his kingdom that we are helping others and serving him? Suddenly the distress comes, and all is changed. Then is

the real trial of the Christian's faith. When George Romanes, the brilliant young professor at Oxford, the friend of Darwin, the one who was to carry on that great man's work, was stricken with the painful disease, of which he died, and the doctors had announced to him that the suffusion of the brain which had begun, and had marked itself in the advancing blindness, would continue, and that he had at most but a few months to live, and he found himself face to face with the arrest of his work, and saw all about him the accumulated material which no one else could use, his friend Canon Scott-Holland wrote to him these words: "It is a tremendous moment when first one is called upon to join the great army of those who suffer. . . . Since Christ, this world of pain is no accident, untoward or sinister, but a lawful department of life, with experiences, interests, adventures, hopes, delights, secrets of its own. These are all thrown open to us as we pass within the gates—things we could never learn or know or see so long as we were well. God help you to walk through this world now open to you as through a kingdom regal, royal, and wide, and glorious."

His spirit at once rose to this summons. He had long been an unbeliever, but his heart had been opened to the faith of the Christian; and

now that he saw that he was called to walk in the way in which his Master had walked, that that way was a royal road, though it was the Via Dolorosa, he was ready to follow. And this was the result as recorded in his biography by his wife: "Now more resolutely than ever he set himself to face the ultimate problems of life and being. It is impossible to tell here of the inner workings of that pure and unselfish soul, of those longings and searchings after God, of the gradual growth in steadfast endurance, in faith. To one or two these are known, and the example of lofty patience and of single-heartedness is not one they are likely to forget."

To-day, where George Romanes's name is known, he is loved and revered, not so much because he was a great scientist, as because he was so sweet and beautiful, so strong and tender, a Christian.

This is the meaning of trial as our Lord himself has interpreted it. When the hour of darkness comes and the sorrow is overwhelming, or the distress is too great for human ministering, then it is that Jesus himself speaks to the broken heart, and calls his child to that outlook upon his own ministry which is at once the promise and the means of the world's healing. He walked in the sorrowful way,

and if that way opens before us, it is that, following him, we may be led into larger service and richer attainments than otherwise could be ours. However dark the day may be, he would keep before our eyes the vision of that new day when he will come into his kingdom and himself extend the blessing beyond human utterance to those who have found no stumbling-block in him, but, entering into "the fellowship of his sufferings," have at last realized "the power of his resurrection." His work in them is accomplished. They shall see him as he is, and be like him !

XVI

THE MANLY SIDE OF TEMPTATION

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear."—1 CORINTHIANS 10. 13.

THE indisputable thing about temptation is its universality. The young man who in self-justification said there was one thing that he could not withstand, namely, temptation, described the common experience; for its effects are as uniform as the experience is universal.

The difficulty begins after we have had the experience, and attempt to explain to ourselves its real significance. It locks itself up with the question of human suffering, and the two together present a problem with which the mind of man has wrestled since the beginning of history, and which remains to-day to most men as insolvable or as unsatisfactorily explained as it ever was. The book of Job, one of the oldest and the most splendid of dramas, is wholly concerned with this question. His voluble friends thought they had the key to the problem as they offered each his neat and satisfactory philosophy of life. The fact is that if we could explain temptation and suf-

fering it would only be a mechanical interpretation of life, and would be intolerable. Life is a battle in which God sends his best and holiest into the agonies and temptations of hell, and in which Jesus, the best, endured the worst. He alone came through the ordeal unscathed. He alone knew so much of the mind of God as to rest undisturbed in his faith in the Father from whom he had come, and who ordered the circumstances in which he suffered.

But we common men have no such knowledge, and God interposes with no miracles or unusual interpretation. When he answers Job in the drama the answer is an undecipherable mystery; and when we find that Job is silent and comforted, the manifest truth is that his comfort does not come from any interpretation that was given him of life's trials and sorrows, but in the simple fact that he knows that God was loving him through it all. The greatness of the book lies here. Out of the dark days of human history, when sorrow and sin lay as a pall on every life, the writer of this tale is able to reach up into the light and hold this truth before the eyes of men for all time; and it is the one great fact for men to know, that God reigns, and that God is love.

The next thing that is to be said about

temptation is that it is needful. One objection that has been urged against the doctrine of evolution is that "It is bad for a man to be set where he looks down on all that has gone before him." This is the position in which the evolutionary process places him; for he is the latest if not the final product of that process. He not only looks back and down upon all that has preceded him, as being in the evolutionary story inferior to himself; but he also looks down upon all about him, for that, too, belongs to the past. If man were left undisturbed in that attitude, his own development would be seriously retarded, if not entirely prevented. The doctrine of individual superiority is one that appeals most powerfully to every heart and is immediately immoral in its effect. It produces arrogance and pride. Temptation comes and quickly discloses the truth about ourselves. It uncovers a man's vain-glory, and startles him out of his proud self-sufficiency. Where he thought himself strong he finds himself weak; for the most common characteristic of temptation is that it attacks us where we are least conscious of our own weakness, at least in the first stages of the attack; and it is the first step that costs. It may, therefore, be said, speaking in the large, that temptation is wholesome as having a place

in the scheme of morality. It is easily justifiable. Indeed, in the scheme of the moral life in which we live, it may well be regarded as essential. Without it, it would be difficult to conceive how man could advance morally. It stands to moral fiber very much as resistance does to physical muscle, something given us to overcome in order that we may grow strong by overcoming.

The next thing to be said is that it is manifestly a part of God's plan. We may say this with some assurance, because when we open the story of our Lord we find that when the time came for him to begin his ministry and to present himself to men as one of themselves, and yet the witness of the Father, he was at once led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. This temptation was manifestly not due to an accident, or to chance, or to any law of heredity, as bringing to him experience lying outside of God's dealings. It was, as presented to him, and as recorded by his disciples, the direct purpose of God, and stood in some important or even essential relation to the work he had to do.

It would seem, therefore, that we are wholly justified in saying that, no matter how sin originated, or what is to be the ultimate method of its expulsion from the universe, temptation,

as we know it in human life, does not lie outside of God's direct dealing with us. If temptation was necessary and appointed by God in the case of Jesus, we may conclude that it is equally necessary and as truly appointed by God for us. God knows all the circumstances of our life. Therefore the comfort and the strength that are to be found in the text, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear." God knows; God can deliver; God will judge justly.

Temptations are of two kinds—those that come as penalty, and those that lie in opportunity. An immediate and awful consequence of wrongdoing is its creation of new temptation. This new form of temptation, new especially because of its power, is due in part to familiarity which dulls the sense of antagonism; in part to habit which quickly fastens chains upon us; to the love of ease which makes us unwilling long to struggle; to loss of shame which so quickly follows undetected transgression; to sophistry with which an unquiet and disregarded conscience soon surrenders; and to loss of moral sensitiveness which marks the gradual but sure surrender of the whole nature to a form of transgression which has become as easy as it is seductive.

We find ourselves in an atmosphere of temp-

tation. We say, "Others do it." We give way to temper, or passion, or the habit of being cross, or reading suggestive books, or frequenting unclean places, or even listening to and repeating vulgar or shameful talk. We, in one direction or another, make temptation for ourselves, solely because we have not resisted the beginnings of evil; and this whole line of conduct and relationship comes as a penalty for the initial surrender.

Now, with this form of temptation we may, perhaps, say that God has nothing to do. We make it for ourselves, and his sole connection with it is that he has placed us in the universe and given us individual powers which make it possible for us to do what we will. We have to form our own character. Not even God can do this for us. This comes as a part of our own work, which we cannot charge upon God, but over which we may well believe God grieves. It is of no use to ask God's help while we continue in such a course. We are doing what we want to do, whether we know it or not. And the petition which Jesus has given us in the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," is not for men and women who deliberately make temptation for themselves, and love it. If one read thoughtfully some of the modern novels which purport to give an accu-

rate description of life as it is among cultivated people, he will see the folly of charging the transgression into which the hero and the heroine are described as ultimately falling as due to heredity, or native temperament, or the sins of their ancestors, or the circumstances with which they are surrounded, as if they had no responsibility themselves. The truth is that they prepare for themselves the temptation, however subtly it is conceived, or with whatever plausible suggestions the situation is justified. At last they fall into the pit which they themselves have digged.

There is, however, an entirely different class of temptation, that which comes with opportunity. Of this it may be said that God lets down a ladder and says to his child, "Come up higher!" It may be a hard climb. It often is attended with pain; it often is in private, not seen of men; but, nevertheless, it is a tremendous temptation, and it is sent of God. Happily, we know that in the vast majority of cases the temptation is not only overcome, but great blessing is won by it. Thousands of young men are to-day in positions of trust, and do not steal. Temptation is constant. Daily God calls them to be strong, to climb, to grow in grace and in character; and the habit has become fixed. They sweep temptation aside

and they press upward. Thousands of young women are turning aside from allurements that offer fine clothes and ease and luxury, in order that they may make growth in service and in character and in conscious strength. In this acceptance of temptation, and resisting it as a matter of duty and of strength and of fixed purpose, lies the real heroism of the common life. Read the story of men like Lincoln and Grant and the great War Secretary Stanton, or of Lord Cromer in Egypt. Here you have men to whom came great opportunity of personal aggrandizement, of making themselves rich, of winning power, through corruption. They not only swept it from them, but they conquered the temptation. They made themselves the men they became; and in doing so they lifted their fellows. "Leave me the glory of dying poor," said the Italian patriot D'Azeglio, when his countrymen at the close of the Austrian War wanted to give him a large gift of money. "I heard," said the apostle in the vision of the revelation, "as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth." These are the voices of those who have fought the fight and have won the victory which is to be

won in this our daily life, with its temptations and its sorrows that are to be bravely borne or victoriously resisted, that men may show their allegiance to God and the strength of their purpose in their efforts to serve him.

So it follows that the common temptations of life are proving us every day. In the intimate letters which General Gordon wrote from Khartoum to his sister during the weary months of that sad siege, he refers more than once to the Old Testament story of Agag, the king of the Amalekites, whom Saul spared and Samuel hewed in pieces before the Lord. He says, "I had a hard half hour this morning hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord." It referred to his custom to spend an hour in his tent in private devotion before the work of the day began. There he examined his own heart carefully, and in his letters he wrote to his sister the story of these inmost struggles. Such phrases as this occur: "Just before I left I told you about Agag. The only way to fight the Amelekite is to keep in union with God in Christ. My constant prayer is against Agag, who, of course, is here as insinuating as ever."

Agag was to him no Turkish Pasha, or Sudanese slave driver, nor any of the foes in flesh or blood against whom Gordon carved out his great career, but just that old and evil self, in

meeting and overcoming which lie the duty, the appointed warfare, the sanctification and growth of character of every one of us. Agag is Self, pleading for notice, saying: "Look at what I have done. Talk about me. Fix your thoughts on me. Do what I want. Get the things that I like." It was against this that Gordon kept up his daily fight. It is against this temptation, which we common Christians find in our own hearts and which comes to us out of every day's experience, that we are to win our crown as he won his. Here is the pattern for manly men, men who do not dally with temptation, men who know themselves and are afraid to sin. Such men do not whine because temptation attacks them. Nor do they charge it back upon God when they fall. Nor do they talk about the mistakes of their father and mother in making them go to church or giving them too much religion when they were children. They know the Devil when they see him. They have acquired the habit of victory over him. They resist him and all his works; and he flees from them, because God is on their side. And they grow to be men in the contest.

XVII

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONVERSION

"I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."—1 TIMOTHY 1. 13.

THIS text leads the thoughts in what may be regarded as modern lines. It is an interesting study in psychology. But let no one think it less serious or less important in consequence. The apostle Paul was in dead earnest. He was in prison. His death was at hand. He writes a brief letter to Timothy, his beloved son in the gospel, crowding into it the experiences of a lifetime. He is full of strong asseverations. "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation," he repeats. He reaffirms the convictions which his long walking with Christ has established; and in the text he applies them to the greatest experience of his life, his conversion. He had some very positive and important things to say about it. They are true for him, and he knows them to be true for all time and for all men.

As we read the short letter we are impressed with his uppermost thought, which is that God has been very good to him. Again and again

he thanks God. Paul was always thanking God. His religion, whatever else is to be said of it—and much is being said nowadays about Paul's religion—is one of gratitude and joy. He rejoices in God always. The love of God which fills his heart overflows in constant expression of thanksgiving and also in constant exhortations to others to share his feeling. He would have all believers know so much of Jesus Christ and walk in such intimate companionship with him that the joy of that companionship and the reality of the love which has redeemed them shall be their constant and richest experience.

We would not think much of Paul's religion if it had not this characteristic. He always talks freely of himself. Other men talking of themselves, of how and what they have done, if their career has been exceptional, may amuse or interest us, but they do not touch our heart. Religion is a matter of the heart; and Paul grips us, not because his experience was in itself so exceptional or so impressive, but because it has this quality of self-forgetting joy and gratitude. He had surrendered his heart with his life to the Lord Jesus Christ, and in that surrender he had entered into experiences which he is eager to share with us.

In the common vicissitudes of life we all

have burdens to bear. We are despondent, or cold, or hardened, and we all want to have our hearts touched. It does not often happen; but when it does we know it and we are quick to respond. When Paul talks about himself it is in a way to touch men's hearts. God has reached his heart. His joy over it is deep and constant, and we are glad for him. What God has done for him he may do for us.

Here is his account of the process. He reviews his innermost experiences and unconsciously gives us this lesson in psychology.

He begins with the important fact that he has discovered that he was before his conversion in a state of unbelief. Here are two things: there is such a thing as a discovery, and there is such a thing as a state of the mind. More than two thousand years ago the Greeks had a highly developed drama, so highly developed that it has never been surpassed. It was an intense study of life and was developed along carefully defined lines. It was held to the single purpose of showing men to themselves in their innermost nature and under the working of the most elemental passions. The study and the art were carried to such perfection that certain laws were deduced for the proper interpretation of the human mind and for the development of its repre-

sentation in the drama. One of these laws was that there must always be presented in the drama, because they are always to be found in life, these two things, recognition, or an awakening (*anagnorisis*), and a revolution, that is, a sudden and complete change (*peripeteia*). These two experiences the Greeks discovered as universal in the inner life of man if that life is to make progress, and as therefore fundamental in the true presentation of that life in the drama.

Whether Paul learned this from his studies, or whether he first learned it from his own experience, the fact is that he constantly refers to it. "Awake, thou that sleepest"; "Awake to soberness righteously"; "Already it is time for you to awake out of sleep," are familiar appeals of his. He discovered that he had been asleep. He did not know it before, but he now realized it. He had gained a new view of himself, and the transition from the old life to the new he characterizes in these terms.

Furthermore, he discovers that he had been in a state of unbelief. To-day much is said about states of consciousness, the hypnotic state, the subconscious self, the other self, and the like. Some of this is trickery; much of it is strange, but more of it is truth; that is, we

have states of mind of which we are imperfectly conscious. Their real relation to our conscious self is not clearly defined, but we are aware of their existence. We have "moods" which, unfortunately, those who live with us have reason to know better than we do ourselves. We recognize them quickly enough in others. We say, "It is his bad day"; or, "He is not himself"; or, "His breakfast did not agree with him"; or, "Something has gone wrong"; and we govern our approaches to one another by our knowledge of these conditions.

Of our own moods we also are more conscious than we are always willing to admit. We were cross, or ugly, or despondent, or self-indulgent in disagreeable ways, and we knew all the time that it was so, but we were little disposed to shake ourselves out of the mood. When it was over we have often wondered at ourselves and asked ourselves why we allowed such a state to continue. But we did allow it, and we probably will again, as we find it is possible to awake to the knowledge of the condition not infrequently and still to revert to it. Indeed, these moods often grow upon us and become a more or less manifest and settled trait of character, even against our own desire, and often much to the grief of those who love us. In short, there are many evi-

dences of the fact that there is such a thing as a state, continuous and more or less settled, of the mind, of which we ourselves are only partially conscious, but which pretty accurately represents our real self, and is the controlling feature of our character. We are willingly indifferent to it, and would perhaps be prompt to resent it if we were charged with it, but it is there and must be reckoned with.

Now, Paul says that his awakening, or self-recognition, brought to him the knowledge of this inner state, and showed to him that it was a state of unbelief. He had been a student, and thought himself a sincere seeker for truth, but he was now aware that there is a realm of truth against which he had been prejudiced and the evidence of which he had not been willing to admit to himself; that because of something in himself, his mental or moral attitude toward it, of which he had been but little conscious, he had been living in a state of resistance to the truth, and that that accurately explains his acts and his moods up to the hour of his awakening. He has had a mirror held up to him. He sees just what his condition was when this awakening came. He was in a state which was wholly unworthy of him; and he did not know it.

Furthermore, he now sees what he did not

see before, that in that state he was a great sinner; not a drunkard, or profligate, or dishonest, or corrupt, a sinner in the common sense of the term, but a sinner against the Lord Jesus Christ and, consequently, against God. He had done the Lord dishonor in word and act and purpose; he was "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious," or, insulting. In every way he had been under the dominion of the state of unbelief in which he was then living. He had held himself back from accepting the truth, and had even persuaded himself that he was doing God service when he was rejecting Jesus Christ and his gospel with all his might. He sees it now, and in the knowledge of it, clear and indisputable as it is in his own heart, all question as to what other things he had done, or not done, falls into insignificance. The one overwhelming truth is that he is a sinner because of his attitude toward Jesus Christ.

We may pause to note that in this discovery Paul is exactly in line with the whole teaching of the New Testament. "We shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." The only song of the redeemed is that he is worthy to receive honor and praise because "he has redeemed them out of every kindred and nation." The final question of that supreme hour is,

What has been the relation of the suppliants to Jesus Christ the Judge? Have they known him, and believed him, and loved and served him? Have their hearts been opened to such revelation as has been made to them of him? Has their life been a growth into his likeness? Then, and not otherwise, "they shall see him as he is, and be like him."

Paul is overwhelmed by the contrast between the love that had been shown to him and what he had failed to show in return. Here is where he grips us. He has come to see the reality of what he did not know of himself. That is what we all need to be taught. We think we are all right. We are satisfied that we are not as other men, or "even as this publican." Are we not gentlemen? Have we not a proper self-respect? Are we not walking carefully and living upright lives? What more can be required? Meanwhile there are revelations of self in the presence of the glory of God and the holiness of God before which the angels cover their faces. And the saintliest souls are seen to be those who are most conscious of their unworthiness. We pause before their confessions. We even doubt their sincerity. We say it is sentiment or tradition. Paul says: "I thought I was doing God service. Now I see. I have been awakened. I know

the truth. I am overwhelmed." We do not feel so. We have no clue to the real meaning of his words; therefore we are in need of being awakened.

Paul now bears testimony that it was the grace of God that awoke and changed him. He did not do it; he was in a state of unbelief. How to get out of that state, he did not know; for he did not realize the need of the change. Indeed, he can hardly believe in its reality, now that he sees how tremendous it was. It seems too much even for God to have done; and when he tries to confirm it to himself and to understand how it came about, he says that perhaps the explanation lies in that he did it ignorantly in his unbelief. He remembers the saying at the beginning of the Old Testament, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever." He remembers how often Israel had hardened his heart, and how God had withdrawn himself, even from his chosen people, because of their unbelief. He sees himself the chief of sinners, and he seeks to assure himself in the mercy that has been shown to him in the thought that perhaps it was because of his ignorance and his state of unbelief.

The fact is that Jesus Christ has come to him; and with him came a new gift and a new power. God has done this for him which he

could not do for himself. It had been simply and easily done, so easily that he lives in perpetual amazement at the thought of it. He was on the way to Damascus, full of his hostility to Jesus Christ, possessed by his state of unbelief, when God spoke to him, and a vision of Christ as he is dawned upon him. Then and there he found he was moved to surrender himself to Jesus Christ. Then and there he saw his unbelief and broke from it and said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He rose from his knees with a new purpose in his heart to do whatever his Lord wanted him to do, and though it was only to go to Damascus, ignorant of what was before him, he was obedient to the heavenly vision, and went on that way in which God himself had led him from step to step until the present hour.

From beginning to end it was God's grace, that grace which now fills his heart with thanksgiving, and in which Paul is continually rejoicing, which then opened his eyes and ever since has guided his life. The one word which describes his whole experience he gives us: "I thank him that *enabled* me, even Christ Jesus our Lord."

Finally, he finds the proof of the reality of this great change in his new love for God and

his new love for men. He says, "The grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with faith and love." His own purpose ever has been to bring men to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

To-day men question conversion. They compare it with hypnotic or medicinal cures, which change men so greatly, and they make light of it as a real experience, or at least as an experience changing the whole man, as the Christian asserts. The radical difference lies in this, that in the Christian's conversion the character is changed. From a state of unbelief he passes into a state of faith, so real, so permanent, that it appears in a new strength to do right, and in a new love for God and man.

The command of Christ to his followers to go and make disciples of all men was but the expression of what is the inevitable impulse of the man who has in reality given himself to the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the blessed work of God's Spirit has been changed from sin to righteousness. He finds a new love in his heart which expresses itself in an eager desire to share his new experience with other men, to bring them to the Lord who has done so much for him. This, from the beginning, has been the distinctive mark of the Christian. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is pre-eminently a missionary faith, not simply be-

cause the Lord has so commanded, but because this is the natural and inevitable expression of the true Christian experience. The first impulse of the heart that is filled with the joy of the Lord is to share that joy with others, and the witness to the Christian of the reality of his own acceptance is the thought of the joy that he will have when he shall see his Lord as he is, that he shall find there others also who share the same joy; and that he, perhaps, has been permitted to have some part, small though it may be, in bringing them to him whom he so loves. The working together with God into which we are called is but the natural outflowing of the love in which the grace of our Lord exceedingly abounds.

XVIII

GOD'S USE OF THE USELESS

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."—MICAH 5. 2.

It used to be said that the plan of redemption is unreasonable because man is so unimportant in the universe, and at best Christians are so few. When men held the Ptolemaic theory that the earth is the center of the universe it might have been possible to accept such a scheme, but now that we know how small a place the earth occupies, even in the visible universe, the doctrine is absurd; the world is far too small and man too insignificant to be made the center of God's thought, or the goal to which creation has led.

The obvious answer is that the new view of the universe wrought no change in men's religious faith. Most of us are, in fact, geocentric. Our thought, as well as our life, is largely circumscribed by the earth on which we live. No one, in planning his life, or in

determining his religious faith, considers whether the sun is actually so many thousands or millions of times bigger than the earth, or whether it is only as big as a dinner plate. The fact is that bigness is no measure of value in interpreting the purpose of God. Greatness and littleness as applied to material things have no meaning in the things of his kingdom. When our thoughts turn to God and we begin to consider our relations to him, our immediate situation, whether we are rich or poor, large or small, in our influence and surroundings, falls out of mind. These considerations belong to a different realm of thought, and the standards and measures of the one do not apply and cannot pass over to the other.

Astronomers speak of the possibility of our solar system being at the center of the universe. It would be idle to attempt to prove it in order to show the importance of man's place in the universe, or the true significance of what is done on this earth, either by God or men. It is equally unimportant whether other worlds are inhabited or not, as necessary to interpret the meaning of life here.

The fact is that the earth has been preparing through countless ages. It is among the smallest of the heavenly bodies. Hegel called it "the Bethlehem of worlds." Large parts of

its surface are still unused by man, for whose uses it seems at last to have been fitted. In fact, in its smallness and in its insignificance it is in the analogy of all God's work, in which the relations of large and small are to us so unintelligible.

Israel was among the smallest of the people of antiquity, and in Israel, time and again, some man from the least of the tribes, and the most insignificant of households, was chosen by God to the first place.

A parallel to this is the place that smaller states have occupied in human history. Greece and Venice and Portugal were in their great days among the smallest. England has always been relatively small, as Europe is to-day among the continents.

The fact is, as scientific men assert, our earth is the most highly organized spot in the universe, and organization brings in a very different standard of measure than bigness. That thought presents at once new conditions, and opens a realm in which bigness and littleness are alike unimportant.

Such as it is, our earth was chosen for the scene of a divine redemption, and according to the revelation given to us in the Scriptures that embraces other realms vaster than our imagination can grasp. The angels "desire

to look into" these things. "Principalities and powers in heavenly places" are concerned with them. The redeemed "without us are not made perfect"; and the kingdom of God in all his universe is intimately concerned with the unfolding of the kingdom of God on earth.

The choice of Bethlehem, therefore, is not only not out of line in God's method, but is so directly in accord with it that it gives us a principle. We are to disregard greatness and littleness and to ask simply, Does this man, this thing, this task, have relations to God, to his love, to his wish? Can this be the Bethlehem of the hour? Can there come out of it a revelation of God to men, or to me?

This thought at once sheds light on the meaning of life. Constantly we see people, apparently the most insignificant and unimportant, turning out to have wide usefulness, or to fill a large place in later life. Who would have thought that the child deaf, dumb, and blind, apparently shut out from all possible connection with the world of humanity, could ever be of importance to anyone? But years pass, and as Helen Keller she becomes an example of what patience and love and skillful teaching can do for the humblest human being, and an inspiration and an example to the great multitude of the deaf, dumb, and blind,

and those who care for them. The little girl in a poor farmer's home seemed to have no important rôle, but Alice Freeman becomes the leading teacher of college girls, and the inspiration of the great army of young women who are pushing out into the new realms of culture and usefulness which to-day are opening for the women of America. In the same way, the slave boy, Booker Washington, apparently has nothing in his make-up or his surroundings to separate him from the multitude of children of the freedmen who form the great burden laid upon the civilization and the life of the newly established American nation; but in the plan of God he was to become the Moses of the new era, to lead the millions of his race in our country out of the hopelessness of their inherited condition into a new life of promise, the possibilities of which and the bounds of which no man can to-day define. So the story of the workhouse lad, afterward known as Henry M. Stanley, just now written, is sure to be an inspiration to a multitude of boys in generations to come, handicapped by the circumstances of their birth or their surroundings, and to inspire them to the courage necessary to make their lives what God would have them become.

These are in the line of a multitude of simi-

lar instances to show that God's ways are not as our ways, and that he can do his work as readily by what men call the small things, as he can by what we regard as the large things of life.

So that we are compelled to ask, Why is not the same true of us? Why may we not do what will make life to us large and profitable and blessed, no matter what our condition or our endowment, if we will but look beyond ourselves and the things which lie about us, and see that we are a part of the plan of God, and that God is working in us and through us? "It is not with us," said William Brewster, the leader of the Pilgrim Fathers, "as with men whom small things can discourage or small disappointments cause to wish themselves home again." It was this spirit which led that little company of exiles landing on the stern and rockbound coast of Massachusetts to devote themselves to the task of doing something to advance the kingdom of Christ in the world, which laid the foundation of this great nation.

This principle interprets for us also the meaning of illness and of death. We measure life by its visible usefulness; but we are taught that that standard is wrong. We say of the trials and disappointments and sorrows and

losses of life, as the text says of Bethlehem, "Thou art little to be among the thousands. There is no place for you in our plan of life. Indeed, you do not belong there at all." And yet these experiences, to us so much worse than useless, so thwarting of our plans and destructive even of our hopes, are in the plan of God. They are indeed chosen of God and ordained for us. They are sent to us without explanation, but so constantly, so inevitably, so universally, as applied to the race, that we cannot fail to see that their existence and purpose are wrought into the very web of God's great plan of the moral universe. We rebel against them. We try in vain to explain them. We bend all our energies to escape them. They destroy our courage and our hope; but our efforts are useless. Our explanations do not satisfy. No progress that we have made in knowledge, or in civilization, or in the mastery of the powers of nature gives us immunity from them. Indeed, the wider our knowledge, the greater the mystery that lies beyond. The more masterful our control over the forces of nature and of life in given directions, the more do we heap up unanticipated difficulties and face unexpected perils at every step. We continually boast of our progress, but life loses none of its sorrows and finds that its anxieties

are always increased. Year by year suicides become more numerous by as much as men give up their faith in God. Everything conspires to force back upon us the primitive conception that back of the universe, and over all life, is God himself, whose ways indeed are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. He saves not by many, nor by few. He assigns to every man both his task and his lot. He suffers none to be tried more than he is able to bear, and with the trial provides a means of escape. The sorrows and disappointments of life are, therefore, to be accepted as truly a part of God's plan and ministers of his grace, as are the successes and the health which move us to such abundant thanksgiving. Bethlehem was in itself nothing; but out of it was to come Him "whose goings forth are from everlasting"; and out of the darkest, most disappointing, most intolerable events in our life may come, if we will, influences that are to go with us into eternity.

Here is where we get the key for interpreting present duty. Is the task small? Is it difficult? Am I insignificant—even unfit? Nevertheless it is in relation to God's work. It is assigned to me by him. It is in accord with his plan. I must hear in it his call to press forward, to use the powers I have, to

look up and not down, forward and not back. When I "lend a hand" it is not simply to help my fellow men, but it is to put my hand in God's, to let him direct its service and bestow the strength which will make that strength efficient. Consequences are with him; and with him is the reward. "What I fear most is lest some call to duty be left unheeded." This saying of Mary Lyon, which was the motto of her life, is the motto of every life that is truly given to his service. As Jesus himself came out of Bethlehem and carried with him to his death the burden of being despised and rejected, one so little esteemed that men hid their faces from him, and yet never faltered in his service, so we are to think little of our Bethlehem of circumstances or endowment, and are to press forward, concerned only that we do not fail in the duty which God has appointed to us. The glory of Bethlehem to-day, the inspiration that comes from it, undiminishing through the centuries more surely than is the energy of radium, is its testimony both to the love and the power of God effectively to deliver us, his children, from ourselves, to carry our weaknesses, to blot out our transgressions, to inspire new hopes, to bestow that newness of life which will enable us, however insignificant, however humble, nay, however

sinful, to play our part, to do God's work and ours, and not to fail at last of the great reward.

We may well make our own this prayer of the late Dr. James Martineau :

“O thou Eternal, in whose appointment my life standeth, thou hast committed to me my work; and I would commit to thee my cares. May I wait upon thy seasons, and leave myself to thee. May I feel that I am not my own, and that thou wilt heed my wants while I am intent upon thy will. May I never walk anxiously, as if my path were hid, but with a mind fixed simply upon the charge intrusted to me, and desiring nothing but the dispositions of thy providence. More and more fill me with a pity for others' trouble which shall bring forgetfulness of my own, with the charity of them that know their own unworthiness, with the promptitude of them that dare not boast of to-morrow and the glad hope of the children of eternity. Lead me in the straight path of simplicity and sanctity, and let neither the flatteries nor the censures of men draw me aside from it. And unto thee, the Beginning and the End, Lord of the living and Refuge of the dying, be thanks and praise forever. Amen.”

XIX

THE VOICE OF GOD IN OUR DAILY LIFE

"The multitude therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it had thundered: others said, An angel hath spoken to him."—JOHN 12. 29.

THE surprise of the text is that when God speaks he can be misunderstood. We know that in human speech as much depends upon the hearer as upon the speaker; as Shakespeare long ago said, "A jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him that hears it"; but we are not prepared for the same limitation when God speaks. In the instance before us the narrative reads, "There came therefore a voice out of heaven," with the immediate comment that the multitude said that it had "thundered"; while still others said that it was "the voice of an angel."

Conditions have not greatly changed to-day. We find ourselves affected by two as widely different comments upon most occurrences. The multitude has its vociferous opinion, and we are more or less under the influence of their noisy dominion. Most of us are glad not to be compelled to do much independent think-

ing, still less to withhold our judgments until we have carefully gathered the facts. It is more comfortable to do as others do, and to think as others think. The warning of the text is lest we may be tempted to do so when God has spoken, and thus may shut ourselves out from hearing his voice and knowing his will.

This brings us of necessity to a fundamental question: Does God ever speak to man? or, Is it only thunder, that is, natural law? Two theories of God's relation to the natural world have been, and, perhaps it should be said, are now, widely prevalent. According to the one, when God created the world he set it going and retired, waiting, perhaps, until it has accomplished his purpose, or, like a run-down clock, should need winding up again; meanwhile it is sufficient in itself, and he need not seriously concern himself about it. According to this conception any voice of God coming into this world, like an interference of God in its operation, would be inconceivable. The more men learn of nature, the more perfect, the more complete and adequate seem its organization and its interlocking machinery. The conception of the universe as a vast, complicated, but perfectly organized machine appeals to the human mind. Men delight in order, and our

conception of all knowledge that is worthy of the name, or is to be thought of as scientific, is that it shall be completely systematized. Indeed, under the dominion of the evolutionary idea of to-day, the monistic conception of all existence is so intellectually truthful that not a few are content in extending it until it shall embrace all conceivable existence, including God himself. From this standpoint the natural world is so perfect an organism that there is really no place for God in it, or, indeed, anywhere else within any realm with which we need to concern ourselves, and obviously the only voice of God that can possibly be looked for, or accepted, is man's interpretation of nature. The multitude is perfectly justified in saying whenever it meets a claim of divine revelation, or of special utterance of divine word, that it "thunders." It can be nothing that is worthy of the attention of men who are busy with the ordinary concerns of daily life.

But there are those who are not content with this interpretation of nature in its relation to God. They conceive of God as immanent in the universe. They see in it not only his handiwork, but his abiding presence. Its life is his life. Its functioning is his doing. Its progress is his procedure. Its adjustments are his thinking. If anything unusual occurs

which by any possibility can be regarded as directed to man's spiritual life, or as appealing to his inner nature, they would interpret it as belonging to phenomena concerning which we are not adequately informed. It is occult, subconscious, spiritualistic, or possibly, in some restricted and unknown sense, supernatural—"An angel hath spoken." And there is not in it present occasion for particular concern on the part of men who have their own business to attend to.

But when we open the Bible we find there the story of men who in some way came to know, or at least to believe, that God could speak to them. So firm was their conviction and so positive was the effect of it upon their lives that the men of their time took note of them. They were seen to differ in very remarkable and essential degree from the men about them. They rose in their lives, as well as in their thoughts, above the plane of the world in which they moved. The men of subsequent generations, observing this, treasured their memory and preserved their story. Here is a long array of them, from Enoch, who "walked with God, and was not, for God took him," to Abraham, who under the stars of the Palestinian sky talked with God as a man talks with his friend; and Jacob, whose

troubled life was still filled with the sense of God's presence and the sure consciousness of God's guidance; and David, coming out of the sheepfold into the life of the great king of Israel, the sweet singer whose psalms have found entrance into and have been the best expression of the deepest thoughts of human hearts; and Stephen, who laid down his life for his faith, and who in the moment of death believed that he saw the face of his Lord; and Paul, to whom God spoke on the way to Damascus, and who ever after had the consciousness that God was with him, directing his life and helping him to do the work which has changed the face of the centuries. These were the first of what we know as old-fashioned Christians, who at least labored under the conviction that God had spoken to them, and in their sturdy effort to obey his voice subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, endured bitter trials and mockings, and wrought the great deeds which have helped forward all that is worth preserving in this troubled world, which has been little worthy of them.

When, reading their story, we come to Jesus of Nazareth and find in him the pattern man, we discover also that he heard God. The great fact with him, as we read the Gospels, is his

ever-present consciousness of God. It is a constant intercourse. When he speaks, he speaks the word of God. When he has a great work to do, he appeals to the strength of God who was with him in the act. When he is burdened and weary, he goes alone upon the mountain, that he may spend hours in communication with God. In the supreme moments of his life, as on the Mount of the Transfiguration, in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross, we find him absorbed with the Divine Presence, or, if for a moment it seems to be withdrawn, crying out for its return, with a cry that would indicate that life was not possible to him apart from the realized presence of God. In the present instance it was entirely in keeping with all we know of him that disregarding the others he should proceed to interpret the voice.

When, therefore, men have said to us all that is to be said about the uniformity of nature and the sufficiency of natural law, and have supplemented this with wise teachings drawn from man's history and from philosophy, and we turn to Jesus Christ, we find ourselves moved to ask what it would mean to us individually if it should be given to us to know God as he knew him, or to have our ears attuned to hear God's voice, and to have it pos-

sible for our lives to be directed by words of his, which, speaking to the inward ear of the soul, if not to the outward ear of the body, would at once enlighten and inspire our daily life? Would you not wish it? And if we are, as we delight to believe, indeed children of God, why should we not expect it? Is it conceivable that our Father in heaven has so far forgotten his children, or removed himself from them, as to leave them no other communication with himself and no other knowledge of himself than is to be gathered from ancient tales of his doings in the original creation, so long ago that no record of them remains, and the imagination falters in trying to arrive at them? Surely it is easier for the Christian to believe that God not only desires to speak to him, but can speak to him, and does speak, in ways that are intended to be effective, and that if we fail to hear such voice or to recognize it the cause lies in ourselves.

This brings us, then, to the final question, How can we hear God's voice? for we must assume that, as we believe there is a God, he from time to time is speaking to us. Obviously, the first necessity is that we expect the voice and make ready for it. The common experience is that men see what they look for, and hear when they listen. A woman is interest-

edly talking with you. Her mind is apparently wholly engaged in what she is saying or hearing. Suddenly, without your noticing that anything has occurred, she turns sharply from you. She has heard the voice of her little child, for which her ear was always open, and which at the first note she heard, and you did not. Many footsteps are passing in the street. One is instantly recognized, because there was one in the waiting group who was listening for it, and momentarily expected it. A great tragedy is represented on the stage; the audience is held spellbound. Behind it is a small group of men busily adjusting the stage scenery, entirely indifferent both to the play and the audience, so absorbed are they in the stage mechanism, which is dependent upon their control. That old man with the bag on his back and an iron hook in his hand moves through the crowd on the sidewalk, seeing neither the beautiful array of the ladies he passes nor the splendor of the equipages on the avenue, so intent is he on the ash-barrels and their contents. If, then, we are to hear the voice of God, and to catch its significance, we must have in our hearts the thought of God as our Friend, in whose love we are living, and to every indication of whose will we are looking for the direction and control of our life. Ob-

viously, if we do not stand in that relation to him, if we have no such thought in our mind or in our heart, if, indeed, we are uncertain whether we wish to hear his voice, or, perhaps, are certain that we do not wish to hear it, for we have no purpose of obeying it, manifestly if he does speak, we are not likely to know it; or, if arrested by it, will be very sure to find it easy to mistake it for something else.

Again, if we are to hear God's voice we must have some knowledge of the direction in which it is likely to come, and of the notes by which we shall recognize it. These are not hard to determine, and yet many seem sadly perplexed as they ask, How can we know God speaks, or what God would have us do? If we recognize that our relation to God is not a casual or occasional one, but is constant; if we really believe that in him we live, and move, and have our being; if we are prepared to find both the joy and the strength of life in that relationship, then we may look for God's voice coming to us in ways that are simple and not hard to understand.

The first of these appears in an opportunity. The occasion for action or choice appears. It is the next thing to be done, or left undone. It represents life as at that moment life is to us in its most definite and tangible

form. It is a call. So far, then, the opportunity is the voice of God speaking to us of what he would have us do, because he has apparently opened the way for our doing it. But we also know that God sometimes opens doors to test us, and that there are doors through which he would have us know his will and show our obedience by not entering them. George Müller, of Bristol, the man of faith, laid much emphasis upon this. This is one of the ripest, if not the earliest, experiences of the man who seeks to do the will of God and to grow in Christian knowledge.

Therefore beyond the opportunity we must seek also the voice of duty. If with the opportunity there arises in the heart the feeling that it would be right to do the thing that offers, and, whatever the cost or the sacrifice, the duty at least is clear, then the voice of God becomes more definite and begins to be impelling.

Then we remember that God has often spoken in the past to those who love him, and we have the record of that speech in the Bible. If, then, when we turn to the Bible we find that the teaching of the Bible, or what we may regard as the echo of God's voice coming to us out of the past, corresponds with what appears the call of duty and the present oppor-

tunity, the voice becomes more distinct and the call more imperative.

This drives us to interrogate our own hearts more carefully, and when we find that the voice of conscience begins to speak in the same direction with something of insistence, we are strengthened in our thought that there can be no mistake in the voice that we have heard.

But if we would be sure we turn to our friends; and then we are glad if we have some friends, or even one, who we know is accustomed to walk humbly with God, whose life shows that he hears a divine voice which he obeys and whose spirit is manifestly that of one who knows God as a friend. We are glad to turn to such a friend and lay the case before him; and, if we find that his judgment corresponds with the purpose forming in our own hearts, we become again more deeply assured that the opening way is a divinely appointed path.

As thus persuaded we begin to move in that opening path, whether it be hard or easy, whether it is a way that we have long sought, or one into which we find ourselves impelled, it may be, with costly sacrifice, in the one case or in the other a new peace begins to reveal itself in the heart with the sweet consciousness that we are doing the will of God and that

his blessing is upon us. The story is told of Algernon Sidney that when, under sentence of death, he was awaiting the hour for his execution and a messenger came from his father who pleaded with him to take the oath of allegiance which would save his life, he sent back this answer: "I have long been of the mind that if the time should ever come when I could not save my life, but by doing an act that would be unworthy of me, I would understand it as indicating that God meant me then to return to him the life which he had intrusted to me." Here was a man who knew God so intimately that he not only knew that God could speak to him, but he taught himself to catch the message and rightly to interpret it whenever and in whatever way it should come. He had no occasion to wait for the clamor of the multitude, or the pronouncement of the few, even if it might be the voice of those who were the nearest and the dearest to him.

But we not only have to expect God's voice, making ready for it, and teaching ourselves to recognize it, if we would hear it, but we must also be prompt to obey it when it is heard. There are three stages in obeying the voice of God, or what the New Testament calls the teaching of the Spirit of God. The first stage

is when the voice comes, and is heard. At the moment we are startled. It seems easy to obey it then, if only we act. If we delay and begin to argue with ourselves it quickly becomes more difficult, and the longer the delay, the more tremulous the hesitation, the more difficult becomes obedience; until we reach the third stage when, because of the delay and the parleying, it has become practically impossible.

This goes far to explain why so many who regard themselves Christians are doubtful of the reality of God's voice ever speaking to them, or are ready to deny its possibility. They have argued about it so long that they not only become doubtful of hearing it, but incapable of obeying when they do hear it. In that way we lower our faith to the plane of our living, and when the life is indifferent to God, or rebellious, the faith walks heavily in its train, and we begin to deny what was once to us a blessed truth. But when we have walked in a different course and have held ourselves to prompt obedience, then we find both strength and peace. Turn to the lives of any of the notable Christians. Sit with William Carey, the young shoemaker, as with other young men of his day in the Bible class he inquires of the learned pastor about the

heathen and what is to be their destiny, and hears the imperious answer, "Whatever God's plans with them may be, you have no duty in that direction." Then go with him on his solitary journey to London to ask if he may go to the heathen; and stand with him in the canebrake in India, where in disguise he is working as a laborer that he may earn his living, acquire the language, and fit himself for that missionary service from which he will not be gainsaid, because he has heard the voice of God calling him to it. Or turn to the story of Charles Gordon at Khartoum, or John Lawrence in India, or James Chalmers, so gladly laying down his life for the men who murdered him in New Guinea, and you will find what it means when we speak of the strength and possibility of the men who heard the voice of God, because they were ready so gladly to obey it. Is there any reason why you and I should not have the same privilege and the same blessing; or that our God should not be our constant Friend, or that we should not know that he is never far from any one of us?

XX

THE KINDNESS OF GOD

“And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?”—2 SAMUEL 9. 3.

DAVID, the king of Israel, learned this phrase from Jonathan, his friend. Some time before, when he had discovered that Saul's hatred for him was deep and permanent, and he had turned with his distress to Jonathan, Saul's son, Jonathan cheered him by assuring him that God was on his side, and that in the end David would be exalted and the house of Saul overthrown. In witness to the sincerity of his words he asked David to promise that when the day should come in which David's enemies were cut off, in that day David would show him and his house “the loving-kindness of Jehovah.” The phrase found a lodgment in David's heart; and now, years afterward, when both Saul and Jonathan are dead and David gets that revelation of the love of a friend which so often comes when death has separated us forever, he breaks out in a eulogy over Jonathan which has been

cherished in this Old Testament narrative and has furnished a beautiful final phrase that has been on the lips of men ever since:

"How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!
Jonathan is slain upon thy high places.
I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan.
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women."

Then he remembers Jonathan's words and awakens to the thought that here is the real source of Jonathan's love for him. He knew himself the kindness of God. It had been the inspiration in Jonathan's life, and had wrought in him that beautiful character which made Jonathan so attractive and gave him such dominion over the hearts of Israel. This was the spring from which flowed the love that was now so precious to David. As he thought upon it the impulse naturally came, "Ought I not to feel the same, and can I not pass it on to others?" Therefore, he asks, "Is there yet any left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" And when the former servant of Saul is brought to him he repeats the question in the form of the text. "The kindness of God" is the compelling force in his heart.

So he sends for Mephibosheth, Jonathan's

son, who alone has survived from the destruction of the house of Saul. He is a helpless cripple, so insignificant and so helpless that he has been overlooked in the general slaughter and has been cared for and taken to the home of one of his father's friends, Machir, the son of Ammiel, who, stirred by the same love which Jonathan had shown to David, and having also some feeling for the kindness of God, risks his own life in protecting the helpless youth. David's troubles had called out Jonathan's affection, and the disaster upon the house of Saul had done the same for Machir.

Troubles are plenty in life. It is of no use to make light of them.

"Before the beginning of years
There came to the making of man
Life with the gift of tears,
Time with the glass that ran."

Here is one certain offset to trouble. Sorrow and pain remain the great mystery; and there is much to be said by the Christian of their place in the plan of God. But when all is said they still return with sharp and often overwhelming impact even upon the stoutest hearts. We are reminded that the "pleasures of each generation evaporate in thin air. It is their pains that increase the spiritual momentum of the world." But we are always

glad when we can get hold of some immediate good that follows upon sharp distress, and we are glad to try to comfort ourselves with it. These were bitter days in Israel. Saul, their first king, the hope of Israel, was dead. Enemies were everywhere. David, as yet, was little known and was a man of war. War, indeed, seemed to be the normal condition of the life of Israel, just as the war of selfish interest is normal in the world to-day. Out of this, as a valley of shadows, a thicket of vague impending evils, sprang this sudden revelation of kindness and love. It is often so. Trouble is a fertile soil for such growth. The poor are the quickest and the most generous in helping the poor. The most sacrificial gifts are to be found among those who are so often seen dividing their last meal with neighbors who have nothing. The great truth that Chalmers taught in his parish in Glasgow, and which the charitable world is finding that it is slow to learn even now, is that the great danger of official charity, however efficient and well administered, is that it may dry up these springs of immediate and generous helpfulness which are ever opening among the poor in their relations one with another. Organized charity is necessary. And most philanthropists are compelled to work through agents who are trained,

or have the time to give to the care of the individual sufferer; but the fact is none the less true that the price that is often paid for such effective assistance is a costly one in the loss of that kind neighborly interest which keeps life human even in the dirtiest tenement and the darkest alley.

But we cannot stop to dwell upon this. We notice that this kindness of God, which appeared working in Jonathan and then in David, is a productive kindness. It has life. It reproduces itself. It bears fruit. This at once interests us. The great and carefully thought out benefactions proclaimed in the legacies of some recently dead millionaire stir the business community, of which he was a member, no less than they do the outside world. Many another rich man is moved to consider what he shall do with his money. Many another millionaire finds himself yielding to impulses of thoughtful benevolence which have hitherto dwelt only on the outskirts of his mind, or which have had no place at all in his thoughts. Many a will is carefully rewritten. Many a request for aid, which has been lightly put aside, is reconsidered. How much more is this true when a benefactor gives himself! Florence Nightingale was followed to the Crimea by a crowd of young English-

women to face the horrors of Sevastopol and the Scutari hospital, and her name remains a sweet fragrance and an abiding inspiration, because she gave herself to a task so distressing in its first presentation and so bitter and so prolonged in its miseries that all the world wondered.

In a great English city the silent monument to "Sister Dora," in the Public Square, tells a similar tale of heroic devotion, which stirs many a kindly impulse in the passing crowd. This is the visible source of the power of the foreign missionary. "Now I know what it has cost you to come to us and live with us," said a Barotsi chief, to Francois Coillard, the French missionary in Central Africa, when the chief had returned from his visit to England. And the graves of that devoted servant of God with his equally devoted wife under the great tree in the heart of Africa are to-day only one of the multitude of similar witnesses to the kindness of God, awakening an immeasurable love in the hearts of Christian men for their fellow men, which are to be seen on every mission field.

The wonderful truth is that everyone can do this, show a kindness that carries something of oneself. It is so simple and so easy, and the opportunities are so constant. Just to give

oneself! Being what we are, and having only what we have, to put oneself at the disposal of another's need! The immediate outcome is that such kindness lives. We die, as Jonathan did. The occasion that called forth the kindness passes away. Perhaps, indeed, it is forgotten, but the deed itself is like seed in the ground. It may lie a long time; by and by it springs up and bears fruit. Such kindness, then, is well worth the while. It is very beautiful in itself, nothing more so—just to be kind, to see another's need, to try to comprehend it and feel it, to lend a hand. How it smoothes out trouble! How it changes the aspect of life! What friends it makes for a lifetime! Sometimes it is only a very little thing that is done. We utterly forget it ourselves. Even a passing smile, an encouraging word, a touch of sympathy, and a downcast one is cheered; new courage comes to a despondent heart.

David went off into the wilderness prepared to endure bitter exile among the Philistines and the mongrel companionship of the cave of Adullam because of Jonathan's love. And now Machir, and, indeed, all the people, felt something of the same, as they heard the new king asking for Jonathan's son that he might show to him the kindness of God.

But, again, we pass on from that. It was "the kindness of God" that went to the heart of the people. This was destined to become a frequent expression in Israel. The Psalms are full of it. "His loving-kindness is great toward us." "We have thought on thy loving-kindness, O God." "Thy loving-kindness is better than life." "Who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies." "Thou showest loving-kindness unto thousands." "I am Jehovah who exerciseth loving-kindness."¹

So we ask, what is this kindness of God? It is what inspires all good in men. There is good in all men, probably much more than we think. It gets buried, like a live coal under ashes, and the ashes accumulate. But we delight in the good whenever it comes to light. It makes all the world kin. It is the real "touch of nature," for, in fact, whether men believe it or not, we all are God's children. David discovered this kindness in his own heart as he had seen it in Jonathan's, and he recognized with Jonathan's help that it was from God. The loving-kindness that he was moved to show to Mephibosheth was only the expression of a forbearance and a tenderness which he had received himself from God, just as Jonathan had. And it was that which kept

¹Psa. 117. 2; 48. 9; 63. 3; 103. 4; Jer. 32. 18; 9. 24.

love alive in his heart. He knew that it came from an inexhaustible source, and therefore he could trust the impulse in his own heart, and could look for a response to it in the hearts of others.

We delight to think that God has made us so. We call this human capacity for kindness normal; and we are glad to believe that it is closely connected with the main purpose of life. God has placed us all in conditions to develop it. God constantly deals with us so as to promote it. Nothing is sadder than to find it crushed out of a man's heart, or a man brought to think that it is so obliterated. When one is persuaded of this he comes as near to being a beast as a man can be. Indeed, the difference between human kindness and that which is its nearest counterpart in the heart of an animal is that in man it is to be recognized as a part of his humanity, a witness to his origin, and really essential if he is to fulfill the purpose of his being. Without it we can hardly conceive of him as a man.

So, again, this loving-kindness is of the nature of God. It is God's character; for "God is love," in the sententious phrase of the apostle. If we only knew God better we would see this. Men doubt it, and when sorrow comes, or great disaster, cry out against God, only

because they do not know God. They deny his existence, or attempt to portray him in the overwhelming forces of nature, in the pestilence, or the earthquake; or they think of him as an omnipotent power, remote and austere in his judgments. They do not realize that the kindness of God is God himself. But the heart that opens to this truth gets a vision of love that transfigures life in all its conditions. It is this love of God and faith in God that make life patient and strong and tender and self-forgetful, and always so beautiful, wherever it is found, whether in the alley or in the palace.

For this kindness of God is Jesus Christ. In him dwells "the fullness of the Godhead bodily." All of God that could be made manifest to men was made manifest in him. And when we turn to him and read his story from beginning to end, it is the revelation of the loving-kindness of God. Its inner note was, "Peace on earth, good will to men." It quickly brought an infinite peace into the heart of Mary, and then of Joseph, and then of one and another saintly soul who came within its influence. Then we see it reaching out and gathering in poor fishermen distraught with doubts and fears, Israelites, indeed, but with despairing hearts both for their country and for them-

selves, transforming them into messengers of life and of light, first to their countrymen and then to the world.

Then it lays hold of the "woman that was a sinner," and of the outcast leper, and the widow by the bier of her only son in the gateway of the little city of Nain. Then in the sorrowing home in Bethany we hear for the first time the blessed word that has brought the comfort of God as well as the kindness of God into thousands of sorrowing homes ever since: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live." Then we stand on Calvary, and we hear again, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And the final message is, "Go ye into all the world with this news, the kindness of God is for you!" So Jesus gave himself for us that we might know what God's love is and that we might show kindness to one another. Thus the religion of Jesus Christ has become itself the final and sufficient revelation of God and the abiding inspiration of all that is best in the life of men.

XXI

LIFE'S GREAT TRUSTS

"For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven."—
MATTHEW 22. 30.

It was our Lord's method to proclaim a great truth under a concrete example. He pointed to the lilies and compared their delicate beauty with Solomon in all his glory. As the eyes of his hearers wander over the fields he seizes the opportunity to warn them against worrying about the things of daily life and asking, "What shall we eat, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" saying to them, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things." "Behold the birds of the heaven; your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they?" He spoke of the joy of the shepherd who finds the sheep that is lost, and he makes it the occasion to emphasize the joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents. He looks at the penny to be paid in tribute, and he says, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are

God's." An eager complainant comes urging him to command his brother to divide with him the inheritance. He says, "Who made me a divider among you?" and at once tells the story of a certain rich man who was increased with goods, but who was a fool, to impress the great truth that religion is not to be exploited for the profit that there may be in it. So, with the text, when certain Sadducees, who believed there is no after life and, therefore, no resurrection, sought to pose him with the question of the much-married woman, his answer is, "In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven." And we now turn to it, forgetting the mocking Sadducees and seeking to possess ourselves of the underlying truth, which our Lord takes that opportunity to emphasize.

We observe that in the plan of human life marriage serves two purposes: primarily, to perpetuate the race; and, secondarily, to develop the higher traits of character which find their true opportunity for culture only in the home. It is to make life humane, no less than human. It will cease when, in the plan of God, the race no longer requires it; and when, in the new conditions of the heavenly life, it gives place to other higher and surer forms of spiritual culture. Then, we are told, "We shall see

him as he is, and be like him." Then our joy shall be full. In that world where his servants are serving him there will be nothing that corrupts, or makes a lie, or that renders it difficult for character to complete itself along the line of a normal growth.

Here, then, is the underlying truth. The relationships, the duties, the tasks, the privileges, the opportunities of this life, all have a present worth that will end with the present life. It is distinctively their earthly function. One has wife, children, home; one has wealth, business, success; one has talents for art or music, or of personal beauty; one has a rich inheritance of race or ancestry, or the gifts of personal charm; one has life given to him in great days when movement is rapid and great things are to be accomplished. Each has his trust in his gifts, or his possessions, or his opportunities. It is a trust for to-day. Its function is immediate. It soon is to be recalled. It has a value, therefore, that, wisely used, is not easily to be overrated. But each has also a particular function that does not end. The effects are eternal. They are taken up and perpetuated in character. How wide their sweep is we can only surmise; for life acts upon life, and the influence of character is not easily to be measured. Nor can we un-

derstand the rôle that time plays in the plan of God. Of all existing things, character is that which, alone, passes on undiminished by time, and with possibilities of influence which extend far beyond the horizon of the life that we know. Because it is what it is, its growth and attainment cannot be considered as completed in any one stage of its existence. The human soul is of the nature of God. It is to expand and to acquire so long as it exists. When it passes, therefore, from this life into the other, it is sure that it will find within its reach other and more effective service than it found in the previous state of its existence. It has used its opportunities here for better or for worse. They have fallen from its grasp only to give place to others that belong to the new life. Therefore, as we look upon ourselves here, we recognize in every direction this double function, that applies to every earthly possession and opportunity: the one transient and brief, the other eternal and spiritual; the one only to meet the necessities of the earthly life, the other to take advantage of the earthly life to start and carry forward the work which is to be the business of the life beyond. On an old sun dial in an English garden is inscribed the legend, "The hours fly; the judgment waits." The temporary passes.

There is in every instance a function and an effect that are eternal. The shadows lengthen. Age, weariness, death are near at hand; but the new day dawns and with it come new powers and life eternal. Marriage, like all the rest, is in its immediate relations given to meet the necessities of the world in which we live. But, at the same time, it is working out results which belong to eternity, and which, when the immediate function of marriage is ended, will be taken up and carried forward by the new agencies which God has reserved for the life that lies beyond.

With this interpretation of our Lord's words we see the immense responsibility that attaches to the possession of these various earthly trusts. Has a man wife, home, children? These have a brief, immediate function. How soon the home breaks up! The children leave the nest. But yesterday they gathered about the familiar table to be fed and clothed and cared for, and to bring the delight and the sweet joys which are the return for the tender but insistent cares of a home. How quickly they will be gone! Therefore, the present must be made much of. Shall we leave, until the children arrive at years of discretion, the teaching of the important things, the discipline of character, the opening of the mind

to God, to the meaning and responsibility of life? Shall we be afraid to talk to them of serious things, or take them into our confidence concerning the great questions which even their young minds are sure to raise? Shall we trust them wholly to servants and teachers, however skilled? If we do, the opportunity for us will quickly end. The immediate value of the earthly privilege will be taken from us, while the effect in those young hearts, which are never to be destroyed, passes on beyond our reach.

Has a man business, or money, or power? Very well! How soon he will be separated from it all! It will have wrought its work and played its part in the life that now is. Whether he use it well or not, its deep effects will endure. Shall he be half-hearted, or careless, or thriftless, or dishonest, thinking that it does not matter? To-morrow life will be gone, and all that the talents meant will have slipped from his hands. Has he an inheritance peculiar and rich in race or ancestry or citizenship; or has he talents that separate him from others and give him opportunity of distinction, so easily won, so rich in reward, when others toil for them in vain and fall disheartened and failing by the roadside? If he is selfish and indifferent to others; if he thinks only of him-

self; if he cares little for the passing hour, except for what it may mean in his own pleasure, or aggrandizement, let him take heed: for the hours fly and the function of this world passes away and is not to return. All these have their immediate obvious value. They bear directly upon some pleasure and the fullness of the life which we are now living. We may feel that we are getting out of them all they are worth to us as the days go by. We may even school ourselves to indifference as to the future, because of the fullness of the life we are living. The other side of the truth is that in addition to their place in the plan of the present life these all are relational to eternity. They all have a permanent effect. They are producing results which are to be delivered into the hands of God for his use when the new day comes. They are intrusted to us as a great trust in the present life, in order that they may prepare us, and those whom we can influence, for something more and better in the life beyond, where they will give place to the other agencies and influences and opportunities which God there has in store for every soul that returns as the child from school to his father's house, when he is summoned to take up the privileged life which is to be lived there and for which he was born.

On the other hand, is any one without the possession of these special privileges? For him is the assurance that these are peculiarly of this world, and are transient; while beyond are others, and far better, awaiting him. To the one who is not married we hear Jesus say: "In the providence of God you are shut out from the joys and the privileges of all that makes for personal culture and growth in the home. Be not downhearted. In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage." In that day it will be found that other relations and other opportunities are provided which will fill the place and do what you need for the development of heart and soul for the larger life. To the one who is poor Jesus says: "You are condemned in the providence of God to toil and dream and hope for privileges which life has not brought. Never mind! In the life beyond, these relations of poverty or wealth, of bondage or freedom, of hopeless repression or of buoyant and expanding growth with the privileges of leisure and of culture, will disappear beyond the grave. Shrouds have no pockets. Naked you were born, and naked you return." What is this but to emphasize the fact that Lazarus in the bosom of God has entered into joys and opportunities and privileges which Dives in his best estate

never knew? God's treasure house is unlimited. It is to be opened as never before in that life which awaits beyond.

Let us hold, then, all these things as a passing possession. We will not allow ourselves to be overburdened by them, nor distressed if we have them not. How quickly like riches they take to themselves wings and fly away! On the monuments in the ancient churches in England one sees the effigies of kings with their crowns, and knights clad *cap-a-pie*, and ladies decked with their laces and their brave broideries; but also other figures emaciated to the bone, to record the wasting disease of which they died; and here and there only a grim skeleton stretched in all its gaunt hideousness above the marble tomb. Which is the truer representation, the king in his splendor, or the skeleton, as marking all that remains? We note the truth suggested by them all. The possessions perish, the man survives. We look for what lies beyond, not only as something to be won, but as something that supersedes. In that world, when, with the marrying and giving in marriage, the wealth and the power and the business of this life shall have passed away, will be found riches of a different kind, bonds of a more enduring nature, opportunities for attainment of promise; in short, a

life such as a loving God, in the vastness of his plans of blessing and the fullness of his wisdom and his power, shall provide for the children of his love. Therefore, our Lord's word, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself," and also, "Every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life."

While, then, we have these things we are to use them, redeeming the time, or, in our Lord's graphic phrase, buying them up as things offered at a bargain in the market, because they must be had now or never. The opportunity is immediate and quickly gone, but they have a value that is enduring. Woe to him who misuses them, or who in his careless indifference forgets that the marrying and the giving in marriage, the opportunities and the demands of the life that now is, while they all belong to to-day, are, because they have relations which are eternal, the great trusts of life.

XXII

THE SETTING UP OF THE ARK

“And David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with joy.”—2 SAMUEL 6. 12.

THE ark stood in Israel for all that helped men to realize God. Therefore it stood for what helps men to attain to what is best, and to help others to do the same. Whatever were the immediate circumstances or the immediate motives of David's act, we can pass them over in view of the fact that the ark placed in his new capital had this value. And in the light of David's history and what we know of his own relation to God it is not too much to assume that he had this purpose in his heart. The ark witnessed to God.

In any case, this was the effect. Jerusalem has been the Holy City ever since. Consider what Jerusalem stands for to-day! Think how hearts through the centuries have thrilled at the mere thought of it! Think how it has become the name for the consummation of every Christian hope! “The New Jerusalem, the city of God!” A thousand memories cluster

about the actual city. It may have been plundered and destroyed and rebuilt and plundered again; it may to-day be squalid and its inhabitants degraded; it may be the scene of the squabbings of the wretched representatives of degenerate Christian faith; it may, indeed, eventually disappear from the face of the earth; still its name attaches to the "Celestial City," and the very thought of it calls up the beatific vision of the heavenly abode where saints of God are to live in uninterrupted communion with their Lord. That for which the ark stood at the beginning is there achieved in its most glorious possibilities.

We may use the text, therefore, with reference to the life of to-day, and ask what it means to us. For the ark stands for all that is given to help men to God. Its counterpart in our life is the Bible, and worship, and the church; and we may ask at once, What are these in fact doing for us? Have we made a Jerusalem with our ark, and are we in our personal and united history advancing in the course in which the work so begun will, for us at least, be completed?

As we raise this question we become aware that many to-day are eager only to put the ark of God where the Philistines cannot get at it. This, perhaps, was the prevalent feeling in

Israel when David brought the ark back; for we read that all Israel thrilled at the sight, but no one wanted the ark in his own home. Many are very solicitous to-day about the Bible and public worship and the church. They are much disturbed over biblical criticism, fearing that the Bible is to lose something of its sanctity, as if we had to stay the ark. Some would make worship very dignified and remote, associating it always with stately churches and beautiful windows and exquisite music and soft carpets and gentle refinement. Many would keep the church a sanctuary uncontaminated by the concerns of daily life, sacred from the world, and all this while not very particular to make much use of the Bible or worship or the church themselves.

Some would set the ark high as a symbol. The Bible and worship and revealed religion are to them chiefly symbols of truth. Their main use is in the impression which they may make. Their worth is to be stated in what are called "value judgments." The Bible is true, it is said, because "it finds me." It has no particular historic importance, nor does it stand for any truth that can be very definitely stated. The day of dogma has passed and even definitions are of little value. Each man must be left to determine what answers his own

need or may perchance correspond to something in his heart. It is desirable to drop the idea of the supernatural, which will carry with it revelation and miracles. The Old Testament is made up of fragments of ancient stories, and how closely similar the New may be is of comparative unimportance. We still have the essentials of religion, and the real value of prayer, and Christian meditation, and spiritual thought and aspiration undisturbed. The ark answers very well for a symbol, each man finding in the symbol what may prove to be good for himself.

Others would set the ark entirely aside as marking merely the beginnings of Christianity. The Bible and public worship and the church, like the ark of the Israelites, are long since outgrown. Questions concerning them may be of interest to antiquarians, and doubtless will be the subject of learned disquisitions from scholars and professors in theological seminaries, but the wise men of the street, who are concerned with the real business of life, and are readers of books, or have had the privileges of education, have no further use for them, and look with outspoken scorn or gentle pity, as the case may be, upon those who still are under the bondage of tradition and feel it a duty daily to read the Bible and go to church.

Recognizing this situation, we turn to the ancient story to see what suggestion it may have for us.

We discover, first of all, that David set up the ark to help himself to realize, and to lead the people to know, that they were dealing with God.

Those were prosperous days in Israel. The king had founded a new capital; riches and luxury and success were beginning to affect the life of the people. Times were coming to be in Israel what they are to-day in every prosperous community. The old was passing away and the new was coming upon them with all the charm and glamour both of novelty and of abounding prosperity. Whether they realized it or not, with the history of the centuries behind us, and even with what we know of our own experience, we can see that they would surely forget God unless from some source they should receive especial help, just as to-day when engaged in large business, with its multitude of cares and its pressing temptations, with increasing wealth and the companionship of those who have already advanced far in the same line, we come upon men about us who have ceased to read the Bible. They begin to neglect worship, both public and private. They find the demands of religion a task

and, very often, a burden. They cease to feel the importance of the church to themselves or the community; and little by little the community itself under this influence begins to drift away from God. The young man coming up to the great city to find a career has a Bible in his trunk, and has no other thought than to maintain the religious habits of his home and to keep himself in constant touch with his mother. But he is in a new atmosphere. The nights are short. The mornings are hurried. The Sabbath finds him tired. The outside world is attractive. What is easier and, in many cases, more inevitable than that his good resolutions will be forgotten and his religious habits will speedily vanish? He may still be strong against temptation and find little charm in evil companions, but the reality of religion and the sense of companionship with Christ fade from his heart.

David was wise enough to anticipate this. He knew the place of the habit of worship in his life, and the relation of what we may call the instruments of worship to those habits. There must be both a time and a place for prayer. There must be something which is a visible reminder of God and of the claims of his worship and his service. The temple was to be the place for the dwelling of the Sheki-

nah of Israel, the presence of God which every Israelite felt when he entered the house of God. The ark was all that Israel boasted at this time in preparation for the temple. David needed it himself, and he needed it also to place it where it would be before the eyes of the people. If he would nourish faith in his own heart, and if he would lead the people in ways of righteousness and of truth, he could not long dispense with its presence.

The situation is not changed to-day. The Christian who would himself hold true to his faith, who would be strong against temptation and grow in character and in the things of God, needs his ark, and he may find it in his Bible, in regular habits of prayer, and in attendance at church. If he would do anything to help others into the Christian life, or to make his influence in the world count for Christ, these things are indispensable. Without them his religion, at best, will be only an inner experience, and may quickly fade away into little more than a sentiment or a memory.

Men have always needed such aids, and certainly the world has not outgrown them. In spite of her temple and her ark and all her incentive to maintain the worship of Jehovah, Israel fell away into idolatry. Without such

aid we certainly cannot hope to do better. In our richer experience and riper knowledge we may be tempted to think that habits and forms and ceremonies tend only to formalism. We have but to consider what the great cathedrals have stood for through the centuries. They arose by virtue of the devotion of a multitude of unknown worshipers, toiling through many years, and they have stood an impressive witness to the Christian faith and a silent but powerful appeal to the community about them, compelling the recognition of God and sustaining the sense of the Divine Presence. To-day their majesty and their silent beauty go far to make serious the mood and to humble the spirit of even the thoughtless man who stands within their walls.

But, in the second place, David's purpose was also to connect religion with God's providential care, and, what is more important still, with his covenant. The ark was the ark of the covenant. It marked the peculiar relationship existing between God and the chosen people. It carried with it the witness of all that God had done in caring for his people, leading them out of Egypt, feeding them in the wilderness, overthrowing their enemies, planting them at last in the land of promise, teaching them through all to rest in that divine care, and to

know and to love the God who so provided for them. When no one in Israel was ready to receive the ark into his home, God had blessed Obed-edom, the Gittite, and all his house, because of the ark of God which he had cared for. This is the record of Christian homes everywhere. Their testimony is abundant, both to God's providential care and to the constancy and extent of his peculiar blessings. What would the possession of the land be without them? What would we be but for what they have been to us in the past? The question before us is, Shall they be preserved, or shall they go down before the wave of worldliness which is sweeping over the land?

The ark of God, as we know it, has been abundantly tested. It is not a mystical possession, an occult experience, known only to the few. The Bible, for example, is within every man's reach. The right for any man to investigate it is thoroughly established. It is an open door through which any man may pass to the knowledge of God and of his own heart. The criticism to which it has been exposed has swept away the difficulties that gathered about the doctrine of its verbal inspiration, while its use, and the history of the Christian centuries, have settled the question of the substantial truth of its representation of

God and of Jesus Christ. We have in it a credible history of Jesus and his apostles, with the account of what God has done to deliver sinful men from the guilt and the bondage of their own transgression, and to open to them a way of life for this world and for the world beyond. The Bible is no longer a veiled authority. It is a source of intelligent knowledge to be studied and pondered and questioned incessantly; and, thus approached and used, it reveals the deep things of God in a larger sense than ever the ark of Israel did. It is the authoritative witness to God, and the great agency by which men can be helped to know God.

So of the church and worship. No man need be in ignorance as to what takes place where they are neglected. They are the God-given help to men to attain to all that is best of strength and peace and that knowledge which leads into life. The day has gone by when men can successfully attempt to separate religion from life. Religion is not simply a matter of the Sabbath and the church; but the Sabbath and the church are necessary to save the religion of the week. If they are neglected, or lightly considered, religion, in every form, in the heart of the individual and in the life of the street and of the store, perishes.

"A Sabbath well spent
Brings a week of content,
And health for the toils of to-morrow;
But a Sabbath profaned,
Whatso'er may be gained,
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow."

The joy which pervaded Israel when the ark was brought to Jerusalem is but a faint expression of what should be the joy in every Christian community where the Bible and the church and worship are set in their proper place in the life of individuals and in the history of all.

XXIII

CHRIST'S LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."—EPHESIANS 5. 25-27.

THE apostle's vision is not of a heavenly glory, but of an earthly reality. The business of his Church is to bring in the kingdom of God on the earth. He has redeemed and glorified and is sanctifying it to be his immediate witness and abiding possession. What its place is to be in the heavenly kingdom, we do not know. That it will have a place, and that all that is in it of love and brotherhood and joy and comfort and strength, all that makes up its true life, as in the case of the individual, will be preserved and will find its final opportunity and realization in the presence of God and the New Jerusalem, we cannot doubt. But the details of that life, despite the splendid vision of the Apocalypse, have not been revealed, and were evidently not the immediate

concern of our Lord or the supreme purpose of the vision given to Saint Paul in the text.

The Church in the New Testament is the whole body of believers. The contrast that from time to time appears, and which we often make to-day, is not between the visible and the invisible Church. It is between the Church as it is and the Church as it is to be; between the Church of to-day and the Church made perfect, the Church which Christ will present to himself "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" when his Spirit is in full possession and his work approaches its triumph.

The vision given to the apostle as described in the text is of Jesus Christ, his Lord, dying for his Church, as in the opening verse of the chapter we have the picture of Christ doing the same for the individual believer: "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God." He had before his mind the mystery of the Incarnation; Christ Jesus "existing in the form of God," "counting not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped," but "emptying himself," "taking the form of a servant," "being made in the likeness of men"; and the beauty of his life, the perfect pattern for human life for all

time; the awe of his sinless character which bowed even the soldiers sent to arrest him; the power of his redeeming love which awoke a new life in every penitent heart that came within his touch; and, above all, the wonder of his sacrificial death, in which "he became obedient even unto the death of the cross." All this, of which Paul was not an actual witness when it transpired, but which had gradually been made clear to his eyes opened by the revelation of the risen Lord given to him at the beginning of his new life, he now saw as the revelation of the love of the Lord for his Church. Years had passed; the days of his captivity had come; his own death, of which everywhere of late he had been warned, was not distant. And now the simple phrase of the text, "Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for it," becomes the supreme, all-embracing truth of his life.

We have this truth, then, to unfold.

Obviously that supreme love will purify the Church. Love tolerates no half-hearted service. Love endures no intruder. It must have all or nothing. Here is the interpretation of that tremendous saying of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Our God is a consuming fire!" Of course; for "God is love," and love, especially a divine love, must sweep

the field. The whole being of God is expressed in that supreme affection. God must change, or eliminate from his universe, all that is unsound and ungentle. Only "the pure in heart shall see God." Manifestly; because the love of God draws to itself all that responds to that love, and that which does not respond cannot see his face. This is the tremendous truth of that revelation of God which Jesus Christ brought into the world. This is the meaning of the great pronouncement, "God so loved the world." The Son of God, who came to make manifest that love, became of necessity the divider between those who consent to its embrace and those who resist. Love must have its way; and the glory of the divine love is that it can and will refine and purify, even though as by fire, or, failing of this, will eliminate from the sphere of the divine action. This is that power of the Spirit of Christ which is so much dwelt upon throughout the New Testament. The Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, whom Jesus promised to send, was to sanctify and renew, to enlighten and guide, to recreate and to sustain, until the work of God in men shall be accomplished.

The hope of the Church lies in this. The world is continually pointing to the shortcomings of the Church and the imperfections, and

even the wickedness, of many who are within the Church, and the Church itself is bewildered over the lifelessness, even the degeneracy, of the great historic Churches, the Roman, the Greek, the Armenian, in which, as corruption coming from the world in which we all alike must live, we ourselves, and the Christian body to which perchance we belong, are in danger of being involved. We ask, How is the Church to be saved? How is its work in the kingdom of God ever to be performed? and the answer comes, By the renewing power of the Spirit of God, the "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," the "wind from the Holy Spirit." This is what the Church has experienced again and again in its past history. This is the object of its incessant prayer. This is the one hope that we must all cherish for returning life in moribund members of the body of Christ, as of the quickening of that vitality in the whole Church which alone constitutes it the body of Christ. With him we will mourn over the Church in its weakness and its imperfections. We may sorrow for others and scrupulously examine ourselves; but the life of the Church is not to be secured in the cutting off of the unworthy, or its rigor with the weak, or the strenuousness of its self-discipline. All this at times may be the par-

ticular object of its immediate care and even the measure of its faithfulness, but its hope is only in the power of the Holy Spirit abiding in the Church and renewing the life of its members. Because the Lord so loved his Church he will not forsake it, and he will not suffer it to go on unawakened or unclean.

If Christ so loves the Church, then we ought to love it. This was the bond that united the early Christians. They went forth to life and to death together. They faced the arena and the beasts. They pressed to martyrdom, as they braved exile and persecution, not as fellow Jews, or Gentiles, or as fishermen, or members of any common trade, or having bonds of any ordinary human relationship. Jesus Christ was the one bond among them; and it was a bond made visible in the fellowship of the Church that bore his name. The supreme strength of that bond lay in the great truths it represented, the truth of God, of the soul, of heaven, of redemption, of immortality, all made real through the Church. Is it any wonder that they were a band quickly to prove itself more invincible than the famous phalanx of Alexander? The testimony of the historian stands: "The Christians pressed to martyrdom, and the world thronged to baptism." This was the force which gave five hundred thou-

sand members to the cause of Christ in the first century. The organization and the love which did the Lord's work so effectively at the beginning are his appointed means for doing his work in the world to-day. It has brought the gospel to us. It has gathered us as the shepherd the lost sheep. It has brought hope and joy into our lives. It has created the civilization of the Christian centuries. Ought we not, then, to cherish our membership in the Church, to love the Church, which in this true sense is the mother of us all, and to believe in it as appointed of God to bring in God's kingdom in the hearts of men and in the world?

Furthermore, we should expect great things of the Church. We should expect this in what it can do for us. The world is fully awake to the value of organization, but the limitation to that value, of which on all sides we are coming to be aware, is the tendency of organizations to crush the individual. By as much as the organization becomes complete and efficient, or passes into the control of one or a few powerful hands, it destroys the liberty of the individual. Witness the heavy-handedness of many of the captains of industry and the masters of the great trusts, and the cruelty of many a trade union in dealing with the individual workingman.

Exactly the opposite is the characteristic of the Christian Church. In proportion as it develops in doing the work of the Lord, or enters into fullness of understanding of his Spirit and his purposes, it exalts each believer, no matter how humble or weak, to a proper recognition of his place in the plan of God. The fixed rule of its life is, if one member suffers all suffer. The head cannot say to the foot, "I have no need of thee"; and only as all contribute their several parts does the whole body grow into the image of its Lord. By the very terms of our membership, we are summoned to have our Church lift us to our best, to hold that ever before us as our goal, and to maintain every incentive that will help us to reach it.

We are constantly falling below our best. In business and in social life we have to depend upon laws and social conventions to keep us within the range of reasonable conduct, not to say within the only conditions of commendable success. In all our personal habits, and still more in the acquisition of character, we can be sure of advancing in right lines, and making attainments that are genuine and desirable, only as we value and secure keenness of religious comprehension and tenderness of Christian love. If we allow these things to

disappear, or to grow cold in our hearts, if religion becomes to us merely a tradition or a name, we are sure to fall off from what is sweetest and best both in our inner life and in our outward deportment; we are sure to become men and women of a different temper and spirit from what we would wish to be. Now, the Church stands for all that will help us to attain the best. Its recurring hours of worship, its invitations to prayer, to self-examination, to testing oneself by the Word of God, as faithfully delivered and pressed upon us, its rebuking, exhorting, instructing, and comforting us, are all to this end, to help us to be men after God's own heart, who can know him and serve him and glorify and enjoy him, both here and hereafter. We should recognize this as the indispensable function of the Church in our personal life, as in the constitution of human society, and make sure that we do not fail of getting the benefit of it.

Finally, the Church is to save men. As such it is God's gift. This is a day of fierce struggle with the world. The Church is hard pressed without, and is in still greater danger from seductive and corrupting influences working within. It is tempted to ignore, or even to deny, the peril and the need of struggle. Everywhere we hear the world cry, "Peace!

Peace!" Perhaps the real reason for the protest is that the Church does not feel competent for the fight. It is too conscious of its own weakness, and finds little to say in reply to those who sneer at its professions and make light of its teachings. When we remember how the Lord loves his Church, then we can believe that he will purify and strengthen it. Its abiding power is in its witness to him. He is competent, whether at any given time the Church is or is not. The sole duty of the Church is to turn to him, to strive to be more like him, to open its heart to his presence, to seek to be filled with his Spirit; and the Spirit of Christ is the one irresistible force in the world. The hardest hearts have broken before it. The bitterest enemies have been changed into friends, and the world has even now begun to see the method and the certainty of the fulfillment of the old prophecy that "a nation shall be born in a day." The Church of Jesus Christ survived the great struggles of the past when Rome went down before the barbarians and civilization was swallowed up in the abyss of universal corruption. It will survive in the great struggle when, as to-day, society is threatened by greed, and luxury, and unbelief, and the strife of class with class. It will reconstruct society on the basis of a brotherhood

gathered about Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Son of Man. It will become the Church of the kingdom of God on earth because it is, and always will be, the Church of the redeemed.

XXIV.

THE SUPREME POSSESSION

“In Christ.”—EPHESIANS 1. 10.

THERE is a mystical element in the religion of Jesus Christ which is difficult to describe. It is an experience rather than a doctrine. The Lord's Supper has always been the symbol of it, and a chief instrument for its expression. The attempt to define it in connection with the Supper has been the cause of the deepest and bitterest divisions in the Christian Church. But, however it has failed in describing it, the Church has always held to the fact. The union of the believer with Christ is to be realized in the rite, and as so realized it is the earnest of an abiding experience which is to be the progressive attainment of the true believer. That union is the important thing, however it may be set forth. It is what Jesus promised and foretold in his last prayer in the seventeenth chapter of John: “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one.” It is what Paul expressed and refers to constantly in his letters. The letter to the Ephesians is full of it. Indeed, as Stier

says, "the mystical relation with Christ is the very soul of the epistle." Among the epistles many are the references to it, such as these: "Spiritual blessings in Christ"; "All things summed up in Christ"; "We are a heritage in him"; "One body in Christ"; "Made alive in Christ"; "Established in Christ"; "New creatures in Christ"; "We triumph in Christ"; the blessed dead are "in Christ."¹ In commenting on Ephesians 1. 6 a German writer says: "We have not redemption in his work without his Person, but in his Person, with which his work forms a living unity."

This phrase, "In Christ," carries us, then, to the very center of religion, not as a theory, but as a practical experience. Though we cannot adequately define it, and only with difficulty can talk successfully about it, we can at least see how large a truth it is.

The phrase suggests being in Christ as in an atmosphere. Atmosphere determines the conditions of life. To a fish it is water, in which it is at home, and, if undisturbed, attains all the possibilities of its being. To the tree it is the air charged with carbonic acid, which the tree absorbs and from which it gains its nourishment and makes its growth.

¹Eph. 1. 3; 1. 10; 1. 11; Rom. 12. 5; 1 Cor. 4. 22; 2 Cor. 1. 21; 5. 17; 2. 14; 1 Thess. 4. 16.

For man it is the oxygenated air. Having that in undiminished quantity, he has vigor, mental rightness, and buoyancy, as well as life. Deprived of it, or even with a diminished supply, he quickly perishes.

We see at once the closeness of the analogy as we turn to the Scripture phrases, "Made alive in Christ," "In him we live, and move, and have our being." We realize this as an atmosphere of love. God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ is with us and about us, caring for us, ordering our life. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." He invites our appeal to him in prayer, and as we seek him prayer becomes not an appeal to meet present need, but a communion, an expression of an intimacy that is constant, and a dependence which is far more than a realized help in time of need. It is a companionship established in a love without which life would seem hardly possible.

In the quotations from his journal which are found at the close of the biography of Henry M. Stanley, the African explorer, we find this testimony, not as something written for others, but as the most memorable experience amid the perils and terrible trials of his struggles in Central Africa. He writes: "Those in whom faith in God is strong feel the same sense of security in the deepest wilds.

An invisible Good Influence surrounds them, to whom they may appeal in distress, an Influence which inspires noble thoughts, comfort in grief, resolution when weakened by misfortune. I imperfectly understand this myself, but I know when I have called I have been answered, strengthened, and assisted. It was of benefit to myself and to others." This experience might be confirmed in fuller expression from the testimony of many a saintly writer; but this from one not conscious of saintliness, or of having a message for others, has its peculiar value. It is the unconscious testimony of a strong man, living the most strenuous life, to the reality of the love of Christ as an abiding presence, as an atmosphere in which alone he found he could face the daily task and meet the constantly recurring peril.

"In Christ" means also living as in a larger world. Paul says in the text that God "sums up all things in Christ, the things in heaven and the things upon earth." The life we are compelled to live here is by itself a petty thing. Diverse as are our individual experiences, they are all substantially one in their common features. We are absorbed in the details of living. We must have food and clothing; we must care for those who are dependent upon us; we must do the work to which our

hands are set; we must succeed according to the measure of our circumstances if it is possible for us to do so. We are driven by ambitions and desires and passions which largely center in ourselves and spring from ourselves. We are aware of the pettiness and often the mean and sordid character of much that we have to do and even of much that we most desire. We know that these things perish in the using. We are aware that we ourselves are the creatures of a day. We can but most inadequately protect, and have little assurance that we can prolong, the life that we are living. Time will surely conquer us, and we shall go out of life as naked as we entered it. We know and care nothing for what is above or beyond it, and we make little or no attempt to interpret it even as we leave it. And it has always been the same. Nearly three thousand years ago we have a picture of it in Homer which corresponds accurately to the picture of it given to us each day in the daily newspaper. This is the way in which a student of Homer describes it: "He sees life as it is. He does not question it; there it is, final, glorious, lovely, august, terrible, sordid, cruel, unjust. And the partially smiling, unmoved, unaccountable Olympians are the symbols of its brute actuality. Not even is there no expla-

nation, there is not even a question to be asked. So it has been; so it is; so it will be.”¹ Your practical man is Homeric. He is content to take life as it is, and make out of it all he can for himself for the passing hour, and to-morrow is as to-day.

But this does not satisfy anyone. God has made us for himself. The soul reaches out for the light that is above and beyond, and perpetually feels for it in the hope that it may find Him who is the Maker of all. Saint Paul does more than this. He knows what is beyond. He sees it and has realized it. It has become to him the true life, the larger world. There is for him a universe in which the divine purpose of redemption is accomplished; a universe in which man becomes a new creature and finds his true life, the realm for which man as a child of God was created. We belong to it. Christ is the center of it. God gathers there all things in him. He was not present when Jesus uttered his final prayer, but he knows it is true: “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one.” He knows where that perfection is to be attained, because he is already having experience of its beginnings. As the saintly Archbishop Leighton beautifully said, “It is but little we can receive here, some

¹Lowe Dickinson.

drops of joy that enter into us; but there we shall enter into joy, as vessels put into a sea of happiness."

The Christian believes this. He has learned it not only from the teaching of Jesus and of Paul, but he has been led into the blessed experience as his own. He now accepts life as God has appointed it to him, but he interrogates it at every point. He asks, "Whence? Why? Whither?" because he knows that behind and beyond is reality. Here we **never** can attain. Beyond is the goal of all and the interpretation of existence; beyond is the larger world of which this world is the smallest and least significant part. It is but the portal to the temple; but the preparation for the life; but the preparatory school for the larger knowledge and service. Money and pleasure and power belong to the things of sense and perish with the senses. Character and the soul and love and truth and God are beyond. All these are to be found in Christ, and nowhere else. The phrase, "In Christ," is the expression of that larger world, that truer life.

"In Christ" also lies the divine help which alone bridges the gulf between this life and the other. We are "made alive in Christ." "He chose us in him." In him we have "our redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness

of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." Apart from Christ we should not know life, and we should not know God. For apart from Christ what have we? We have nature; and some would have us live according to nature, as if reading its laws and being obedient to its teachings we should attain the real purpose of being. But what is nature? It is like Niagara. "It is force without direction, noise without significance, speed without accomplishment. All day and all night the water rushes and roars. It does nothing, it has no significance. There is no progress. It is always the same river. New waves succeed others forever, but always the old forms, always the same tale, the victory of the strong over the weak, of the active over the reflective, of intelligence over intellect."¹

Life is always the same old enigma. The "Why?" and the "To what end?" are never answered. To men in this world of nature and sin Jesus came. In him is life that leads to God. What we cannot do he does for us. He pardons; he renews; he teaches and leads. "In Christ" is all. We find deliverance from the past, strength for the present, hope for the future. In proportion as we are in him we live. To the old elder, asking the Scotch lassie,

¹Lowe Dickinson,

"How do you know you are a Christian?" she answered, "Why, he saved my soul!" That was an explanation that no interrogations and no fears could disturb. "I gave up all for him," said John Calvin, "and what have I found? I have found everything in him." Having Christ, being in him, we need no more. The heart knows its possession, and that is enough.

XXV

THE CHALLENGE TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

"And I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and, behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand."—ZECHARIAH 2. 1.

THIS is a prophetic picture of a man of the world passing judgment on the Church. Interrogated as to his purpose, he says, "It is to measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof and the length thereof." He is further described as a young man, evidently full of new knowledge, as is the young man of to-day, and, like the young man of to-day, eager to apply that knowledge to the right and the left, and, especially, to the Church of God, which demands so much and occupies so large a place.

The interpreting angel, who talks with the prophet, explains the purpose of the vision, with the sententious utterance, "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls," or, as it was given in the Authorized Version, "as towns without walls."

At once we have the picture of the modern city, as distinct from the ancient one, sug-

gested to us by some European cities, where within the modern city is still to be seen the old town shut in within the circle of what remains of the ancient walls. The walls were once a necessity for its preservation; but the constricting power of the wall not only prevented growth, but compelled the inhabitants to adjust their lives to ever-narrowing conditions. When the day of the new city came its characteristic was that it burst through the walls like overflowing waters, covering the adjacent territory and rapidly developing entirely new conditions, until we have the modern city, transcending all bounds, leaping over all restraints, growing by incalculable forces in ways that cannot be forecast, and at a rate that is not readily to be estimated, as it eats up the adjacent fields and draws to itself an ever-increasing proportion of the population of the state. There were great cities in ancient days, but they were great only as they were able to sustain and extend their walls. The vision of the prophet was of a new day and of a new life. It was a vision hard for him to understand, but open and intelligible to us.

The message is for the Church of to-day. The world is full of new thought, and the young man with the measuring line stands as the expression of it. He comes with his

new science. He points to new social conditions and marks the contrast which the Church seems to present. The air is burdened with the cries of all the new movements. Socialism is rampant in the political world. Protestantism is said to be in decay. The Christians are weak in faith, insincere in their professions, and unworthy in their life. Roman Catholicism is held up in contrast as having more efficient organization, a more aggressive policy, and succeeding where Protestantism is said to fail; and this in face of the fact that it represents a discredited authority, a disproved creed, and a corrupting despotism. The young man finds it not hard to apply his measuring rod, and to pronounce authoritative judgment upon the Christian Church. You hear his voice on all sides, and everywhere he is impatient of question or reply.

To him and to his kind comes God's answer: Jerusalem is a city without walls. Your measuring line is out of place. Here work is going forward under conditions which you cannot understand, and obedient to forces for which you have no standards of measurement. You might as well attempt to measure electricity with a yardstick, or light with a bushel basket, or love with a pair of scales. The Lord is doing his own work in the world with an agency

that is entirely outside of your comprehension. The Lord will be "a wall of fire round about her." Zion shall shake off her bondage. Her enemies shall be a spoil. The Lord shall inherit Judah, and dwell in the midst of her. She is the apple of his eye, at once his care and his glory.

So far the prophet. We might stop with this and let it stand as a picture, to find its own interpretation in the unfolding of the kingdom of God; but it shall serve to turn our attention to certain foundation truths.

The first of these is that religion is a matter of the soul, an attitude toward God. This constitutes a distinction that is real and valid. As a matter of fact, in his immediate life man is to be found out of relation with God. In the light of our understanding of ourselves and our reading of human history we are justified in calling this abnormal. The world recognizes this more or less constantly, and continually offers explanations and seeks devices by which men can be explained to themselves, or helped into conditions in which human life shall appear more reasonable, and the ever-present burden of its insufficiency and its abnormality be lifted from men's hearts.

The gospel of Christ brings at once the explanation and the cure. It seeks to plant a

new life in the hearts of men, a life so different in its characteristics and its goal, so sufficient in the forces by which it is maintained, that it supersedes the old life, changing its abnormality into a just and normal and permanent relation to God. It brings the assurance of pardon for the past, a new strength for the present, and assured guidance for the future. The man who accepts it finds himself at once in new relations to God; a new love takes possession of his heart; a new sense of divine companionship fills his soul; and a new hope and a new courage at once begin to reveal themselves in the presence and the tasks of his daily life.

The challenge of the world is to ignore or to deny this change. It points out the great progress that the world is making in all directions, and the growing adjustment everywhere of life and thought among civilized and cultivated people, to what are called the Christian standards. It minimizes the distinction between the Church and the world, and it approves and encourages every effort on the part of the Church to busy itself with remedying the evils of society and of the state. It would make this the supreme test of the real value of the Church, and as far as possible limit its function to this service. Under the pressure

felt on every side, the Church is tempted to yield to it, and finds herself continually struggling to meet new conditions by new forms of philanthropic or civic service, while she explains away her distinctive doctrines and deprecates her own history and traditions; until the Church is to be seen in many a community preaching a diluted gospel and apparently conscious of no message either to the satisfied sinner or the sorrowing penitent. It was in view of this that Professor Francis Peabody, of Cambridge, felt himself called in a recent address in Chicago to say that the Church is diverted from her original purpose of redeeming and sanctifying the individual soul. She is substituting clubs, gymnasiums, dispensaries, and the like, and diminishing her devotion to worship that she may apply her energies to work. The practice of the Presence of God is easily forgotten in the practice of the service of man. An industrial revolution is sought in the place of the spiritual evolution. Christians are so busy doing good that they have no time to be good.

The warning comes to us that the primary business of the Church is to change men's hearts. Like a railway train off the track, or a ship at sea without chart or compass, a man whose heart is not right with God can only

wander more or less aimlessly, or exert himself with little satisfaction for his own peace or the welfare of others.

This is the day of the specialist. Nowhere are men satisfied unless work is done as well as it can be done by one who has devoted himself to the doing of that particular thing until he can do it better than others. The specialist has his limitations. But, for all that, the world is making progress, and the world is eager in its activity because it knows the value of the specialist, and has adopted as its motto, "Every man to his task." The Church is a specialist in the work of saving souls. Her primary business is adjusting men to God, and in that way adjusting them to life. If she gives up that work for any other she will not only fail in her great business, but she will lose the respect of the community. These other things she may, and indeed must, find desirable to do, for we are to live in this world and do our part like men; but the other she must not leave undone under penalty of losing her inheritance.

Furthermore, it is to be noted that the change that religion works is not to be measured in outward things. It is not measured by our knowledge, nor our success, nor our wealth, but by an inner relation to God, by

peace and love and faith and joy and hope; for these, and not the others, are the "fruits of the Spirit." It crowds a man back upon his inner self. It begins by requiring honest and thorough self-examination. It exalts the importance of motive, and sets a man to the difficult and often unpleasant task of holding the mirror of truth up to himself, and judging the character of his own thoughts and words by their relation to Jesus Christ. John Stuart Mill said, "I have learned from experience that any false opinions may be changed for true ones without in the least altering the habits of mind of which false opinions are the result." The Church brings right opinions to substitute for false ones, but she does not make the mistake of teaching that her work is accomplished when men have simply changed their opinions. The essence of faith is to plant leaven in a man's heart, which will work out in his life in proportion as his heart is changed.

We are eager to substitute external authority for internal examination and discipline, and are better satisfied with changes which appear to men and are approved by them than we are by that change in our own spirits which can only be wrought by the Spirit of God when a man subjects himself with earnest purpose to his guidance. We are

glad if we can be acquitted of the toil and burden of responsibility by shifting it upon some external authority, particularly on an imposing Church or a dogmatic priesthood. And in the same spirit we long for visible changes, immediate and structural, in society and in politics, which shall mark our adhesion to the Church and to Christ. Responsible external authority and visible material good press to the front, even where Christianity is presented in the humblest form, and at the price of the greatest personal sacrifice. When the French missionary, Francois Coillard, stood before the Barotsi king, who for many months had kept him at the frontier of his country and only at last reluctantly permitted him to come into his presence to deliver his message, after the missionary had spoken to the king and his attendant chiefs for an hour, delivering to them the message of the gospel, the king impatiently interrupted, saying: "You come to me, the ambassador of the Prince of Peace, you say, and you bring only words! I thought at least you would give me guns!" And when afterward the war broke out between England and the Zulus and the missionary was charged by the natives with the failure of his religion to control the Christian nations from whom he had come, he turned sorrowfully to his

tent and wrote in his journal, "If we cannot influence nations, we can go on saving souls." It was this recognition of the supreme purpose of his calling, and the independence of his work in the hearts of men from the measures which the world continually seeks to apply from the outside life, that gave him the courage to live through those terrible years, and, at last, when his work was done and the cross was planted in the heart of Central Africa so firmly as never to be uprooted, to lay his own body for its last resting place in the soil which he had thus won for Christ by winning men one by one to his gospel.

The third abiding truth is that this work of the Church is God's work rather than ours. Therefore she knows no bounds. Zion is a "city without walls." She delights in difficult things. She knows no impossibilities. The poorest man responds to the summons to rise above himself. He becomes a God-made man. "Show him that," as Carlyle said, "and the dullest drudge kindles into a hero." The question of the hour to the Church is not, What is your demand? but, What is your gospel? not, What is your range? but, What is your power? What is the life that you have?

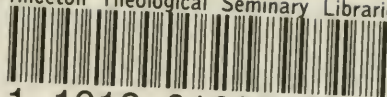
If the Church is filled with the Spirit of God, if she relies on God for her strength and her

life, then her power and her possibilities of usefulness are not to be measured at any given time by her size in comparison with other institutions, or by her visible activities.

We want activity. We want boldness and we want conquest. But true religion has simplicity, purity, blamelessness, love, faith, sweetness. It grows as the hearts of men open for the indwelling of the Spirit of God.

The true Christian cares little for rights, but much for privilege, the privilege of service to God and men. If a man seeks his own advantage it is of little use giving him political power, or changing his material surroundings. The advance of men in civilization is not to be measured so much by improvement in material conditions as by self-imposed restrictions cheerfully adopted for the sake of others. A Church may have breadth and length, as the state may have prosperity and dominion, and not be Christian. She must have height; that is, have extension toward God. When that is true of any Church, and the Spirit of God dwells manifestly within her, she may well be fearless of criticism and of greed, or of the young man with the measuring rod. Her life shall be that of a city without walls, and Jehovah will be her glory. This is the conviction we are summoned to hold fast.

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